

2018

Perception of Retained Kindergarten and First Grade Students: A Qualitative Study

Tina Mollett

Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.pcom.edu/psychology_dissertations

Part of the [School Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mollett, Tina, "Perception of Retained Kindergarten and First Grade Students: A Qualitative Study" (2018). *PCOM Psychology Dissertations*. 483.

https://digitalcommons.pcom.edu/psychology_dissertations/483

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Dissertations, Theses and Papers at DigitalCommons@PCOM. It has been accepted for inclusion in PCOM Psychology Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@PCOM. For more information, please contact library@pcom.edu.

Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine

Department of Psychology

PERCEPTION OF RETAINED KINDERGARTEN AND FIRST GRADE STUDENTS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Tina Mollett

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Psychology

May 2018

Retention Outcomes

Permission to Copy

Retention Outcomes

PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

This is to certify that the thesis presented to us by Tina Mollett on the 14th of May, 2018, in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Psychology, has been examined and is acceptable in both scholarship and literary quality

Committee Member's Signatures:

Jessica Glass-Kendorski, PhD, NCSP, Chairperson

Virginia Salzer, PhD, NCSP

Karen Taratuski, PsyD, NCSP

Robert A DiTomasso, PhD, ABPP, Chair, Department of Psychology

Acknowledgements

Sincere gratitude to each and every person who sacrificed, offered support or guidance, or in any other way helped this final product to come to fruition.

Abstract

This qualitative study focuses on the experiences of 11 school-aged children who were retained during either their Kindergarten or 1st grade years. By using a semi-structured interview, the author examined these children's beliefs about the reasons why they were retained through exploration of their memories, feelings, and outcomes associated with the experiences. Children were also encouraged to reflect on aspects of the experiences they wished had gone differently and to offer advice to other children who may be preparing for retention experiences. The results indicated that there is evidence of some resiliency; however, children generally experienced a wide variety of emotions and their self-esteem was impacted. Children were most concerned about losing social connections with their peers in the context of repeating the grade. Improved communication in helping children to understand the reasons for their retentions are needed.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background of the Problem.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the study.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	4
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Considering the who and why of Retention.....	7
Characteristics of retained students.....	7
Studies with an eye on minorities and other disadvantaged students.....	7
Does anyone benefit from retention?	9
How do various school members view retention?	10
Factors of importance to teachers.....	10
How do teachers interpret the data?	13
Characteristics of stakeholders.....	16
How are retention decisions made?	17
Considerations for retention decisions.....	17
Student opinions.....	18
Results of qualitative studies.....	18

Chapter 3: Methods.....	21
Participants.....	21
Overview of Research Design.....	24
Measures.....	25
Procedures.....	25
Data Analysis and Interpretation.....	27
Chapter 4: Results.....	31
Findings.....	31
Discussion of Findings.....	31
Demographic Findings.....	32
Descriptive Findings.....	33
Judgments.....	35
The Finding Out Process.....	35
Friendships.....	36
Reflections on Feelings.....	37
Should Things Have Gone Differently?	38
Retention Regrets.....	38
Advice for Others About to Face a Retention.....	40
Resiliency.....	41
Problems Persisting Post-Retention.....	41
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	43
Overview.....	43
Summary of the Findings.....	44
Discussion of Thematic Constructs.....	45
Increased Confidence and Resiliency.....	45

Impact of Friendships and Peer Differences.....	47
Wide Variety of Emotions.....	49
Expressed Judgments.....	52
Blaming Factors.....	54
The “Gift of Time”.....	55
Regrets.....	56
Children Lack a Cohesive Understanding of the Reasons for Retention.....	57
Significance of the Findings.....	62
The Good News.....	63
The Matter of Importance for Retained Children.....	65
Unresolved Issues.....	68
What Does Retention Say About Me?	69
Improved Communication Regarding the Reason for Retention is Needed.....	70
Impact of the Findings.....	72
Limitations of the Study.....	77
References.....	80
Appendix A (Assent Form).....	95
Appendix B (Consent Form).....	98
Appendix C (Call for Research Participants)	99
Appendix D (List of Research Questions).....	100
List of Figures.....	viii
List of Tables.....	ix

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Prevalence of Each Category Defined During Initial and Focused Coding....	28
Figure 3.2 Thematic Constructs.....	30
Figure 5.1 Prevalence of Each Category Defined During Initial Coding.....	45
Figure 5.2 Types of Emotions Expressed.....	50
Figure 5.3 Frequency of Self-Attributes Identified.....	54
Figure 5.4 Reasons for Retention Identified.....	58

List of Tables

Table 1 Descriptive Findings of the Participants.....	33
Table 2 Reasons for Retention (Compared With Support Services) Participant 1-8.....	61
Table 3 Reasons for Retention (Compared with Support Services) Participant 9-11....	62

Retention Outcomes

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Problem

Despite the large body of research supporting the ill-effects of early grade retention (Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Dauber S., 2003; Bonvin, P., Bless, G., & Schuepbach, M., 2008; Hong, G. & Yu, B., 2008), many teachers and stakeholders continue to believe in the value of retention practices and continue to recommend that low performing or “young” students repeat the grade (Tanner, K.C. & Galis, S.A. , 1997; Range, B., Pijanowski, J, Holt, C., & Young, S, 2010; Roberts, D.C., 2008). The mindset of teachers often reflects the idea that research does not represent the individual needs of each child, especially the child for whom they are recommending retention (Tomchin, E. M., & Impara, J. C. 1992). Thus, the application of retention policies in the school setting is often restrained by non-administrative gate keepers. If teachers are expected to be part of the solution to moving toward more effective responses to low achieving or immature students, then they must believe that retention is not a viable option (Jimerson, S. & Kaufman, A., 2003). One way to accomplish this is to provide school teams with more specific, insightful information that sheds light on the actual experiences of children who have been retained. The most effective way to obtain relevant and personal information about the experience of early grade retention is to interview students who have previously experienced a kindergarten or first grade retention and to gain insight about their thoughts and perceptions related to that experience. The goal of gathering this information will be two-fold. First, the personal experiences of retained children will be unveiled for the first time in the research literature. Second, extending practice and interventions related to addressing needs of struggling students can be addressed.

Statement of the Problem

Despite all of the available research on retention outcomes, the literature is scant at best (Anderson, G. E., Jimerson, S. R., & Whipple, A. D., 2005) in capturing the actual experiences and perceptions of the students who have been retained. Specifically, researchers have not asked children how they felt about their retentions, if they understood the reasons why they were retained, and whether or not their experiences of the event were positive or negative. Teachers who are often integral members of the decision making team for retention (Byrnes, D. A., 1989), have been left to guess about the personal impacts of retention on students and adherence to the literature showing the neutral to negative benefits of retention can sometimes be lost in the midst of decision making for individual students (Roberts, D.C., 2008). Part of the reason for dismissing the research in retention decisions is that school teams are the ones to have first-hand experience of the child's second year of kindergarten or first grade (Ray, K., Smith, M. , 2010). This time period when benefits of retention can be observed often serves as the barometer for the evaluation of the success of a retention decision (Range et al., 2010). If teachers and school teams are going to make informed decisions regarding retention practices, then they need to have a more meaningful understanding of the specific impacts of their decisions (Tanner, K.C. & Galis, S.A., 1997). A study of this nature has never been conducted and would provide meaningful anecdotal information, which may be important in actively influencing teacher beliefs about retention. Ultimately, the proposed research will better inform considerations and practices related to retention in order to better control for social and emotional pitfalls (Bonvin et al. 2008; Jimerson, S.

R., Ferguson, P., Whipple, A., Anderson, G., & Dalton, M., 2002; Wu, W., West, S., & Hughes, J. , 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to improve the attitudes and misconceptions of stakeholders regarding the impacts of retention on the self-perceptions and feelings of students who have previously been retained (Tanner, K.C. & Galis, S.A., 1997). To accomplish this goal, it will be of critical importance for readers to understand how children process and evaluate retention decisions. Currently, the research on retention decisions has focused on academic outcomes (Alexander et al. 2003; Bowman-Perrott, L. J., Herrera, S., & Marry, K., 2010; Burkam, D. T, LoGerfo, L., Ready, D., & Lee, V. E., 2007; Fager, J. & Richen, R., 1999, Hong, G., & Yu, B., 2007; Jackson, G.D. ,1975; Jimerson, S. & Kaufman, A. , 2003; Jimerson, S. R., & Ferguson, P., 2007) and studies correlating retention with various social/emotional outcomes such as self-esteem, academic confidence, graduate rates, socialization, and emotional regulation (Bonvin et al., 2008; Jimerson et al. 2002; Wu et al. 2010, Yamamoto, K., & Byrnes, D.A. 1987). Although a relationship between retention and self-esteem has been suggested, the nature and extent of such causal relationships has not been examined. Rather than linking a life event such as retention with generalized student self-perceptions in later grades (Holmes, C. T., 1989; Holmes, C. T., & Matthews, K. M., 1984; Hong, G., & Yu, B., 2008; Jimerson, S. R., & Ferguson, P., 2007; Jimerson et al. 2002, Wu et al. 2010), this study will determine conclusively whether or not retention has specific effects on a student's self-perception. Not only will this study allow the voices of the children to be heard for

the first time, but the impact of their messages will serve to influence school teams actively in the decision making process. Ultimately, this study will assist school teams in making well informed decisions related to recommendations for retention as well as implementing more effective strategies for supporting struggling learners.

Theoretical Framework

The current research suggests that children who are retained do not benefit in the long-term from retention, and that they are often harmed emotionally by such practices (Bonvin et al. 2008; Jimerson et al. 2002; Wu et al. 2010, Yamamoto, K., &, Byrnes, D.A. 1987). In order to work towards a solution of avoiding negative effects, it is paramount to understand the reason why negative social-emotional outcomes occur. In order to accomplish this task, it is critical to understand what children who are retained believe about the reason for their retention and thus how they ultimately conceptualize that experience. By asking children what they thought and felt about retention decisions at the time of the retention and, also following the retention, will provide clear information about whether or not children are impacted positively, negatively, or at all, by such decisions. When this information is uncovered, then opportunities for supporting potential, negative outcomes of retention can be implemented. If retention practices are going to continue, then teachers and school teams will have the opportunity to help children better understand the reasons why retention is needed or recommended. Ultimately, decision makers can be much better informed about the impact of retention decisions as well as developing more holistic practices when retention is deemed necessary.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The impacts of retention have been studied extensively in the research. A particular emphasis on early retention is important because the underlying thought process related to retention decisions is not only academic at this level, but it is also often rooted in concerns of emotional immaturity that will impact a child's success with accessing the next year's curriculum (Byrnes, 1989). Shepard and Smith (Shepard & Smith, 1986; Shepard, 1989) have taken the time, using well-controlled studies, to look at early retention in particular. They have found that not only are the benefits of retention extremely hard to find, but also the corresponding emotional reactivity of children with a history of retention is of concern. The only advantage that was able to be gleaned from the studies in terms of academics was that relative gains could often be found for students during their second kindergarten year. However, Mantzicopoulos & Morrison (1992) showed that any academic gains made in reading or math in the short run were not found, respectively, by the end of 2nd grade. Thus, the benefits of retention did not live up to the desired outcomes.

When looking at more emotional outcomes, some studies have focused on popularity as a measure of social adjustment, or on behavior differences (Mantzicopoulos, Morrison, Hinshaw, & Carte, 1989; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1990; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1994). Investigations of this nature typically favor retained students as being less popular and having more behavioral difficulties than non-

retained peers. When compared with low performing but promoted peers, retained students have been found to have increased aggression, lower general self-esteem, and decreased academic self-concept (Brophy, 2006; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Martin, 2009). Part of the impact on a retained child's social/emotional well-being is thought to stem from the idea that when a child does not move with his or her peer group, the child misses exposure to typical social and intellectual experiences. Subsequently, his or her socialization skills and interest in age appropriate materials and activities are impacted. (Morrison, Griffith, & Alberts, 1997). Conversely, Hong & Yu (2008) compared the self-perceived competence, interest in academic learning, interest in peer relationships, and the effects of child internalizing problem behaviors. These researchers, in their analysis and review of rating forms completed by teachers, parents and children, found no evidence to support deleterious effect on the social-development of retained children. Interestingly, Mantzicopoulos & Morrison's 1992 study actually showed a trend toward more positive social adjustment over time for retained students in the school setting. This finding is contrary to the majority of literature on the topic exploring the characteristics related to social adjustment between promoted and non-promoted children. Perhaps studies finding "no effects" and even positive effects on social-emotional development, are connected to research (Byrnes, 1989), suggesting that Kindergarten children are too young to understand the concept of retention. However, one study (Silberglitt, B., Jimerson, S. R., Burns, M. K., & Appleton, J. J., 2006) compared long-term outcomes for early retained students (K-2) compared with those retained in later years (3-6) and found similar levels of social/emotional functioning by the 8th grade.

Considering the Who and Why of Retention

A. Characteristics of retained students

In the 1980s the race to improve educational standards contributed to support for grade retention. There was a call to apply a more rigorous curriculum, to monitor student achievement, and influence teacher participation in tracking student progress (Mitchell & Encarnation, 1984; Murphy, 1990; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). One study (Mantzicopoulos, et al., 1989) aimed to determine if there were any similarities (outside of social immaturity) that seemed to put a child at greater risk for being retained. This study found that retained children were more likely to have one or more of the following characteristics: male, young age, low socioeconomic status, low IQ, low pre-academic achievement scores; there were also observed difficulties with visual-motor integration, perceptual organization, and behavior. The characteristics that were found to account for the greatest variance were perceptual problems, age, pre-academic reading achievement and gender. Still others studies focusing primarily on demographic characteristics have also showed factors tied to minority status, living with one parent, and being born to a teenage mother. (Chen, X., Chengfang, L., Zhang, L., Shi, Y., & Rozelle, S., 2010; Martin, 2009; Greene & Winters, 2009; Hong & Yu, 2007).

B. Studies with an eye on minorities and other disadvantaged students

Unfortunately, not only is grade retention not a promising intervention strategy, but there are certain groups of students who are more likely to be cast into this poorly supported and unhelpful source of remediation. What the research does show is that the most disadvantaged students are disproportionately affected. By the 3rd-6th grades, the

retention rates of Hispanic students and of African American students are 10% greater than white students with all other variables being equal (Alexander et al., 2003; Bianchi, 1984; Corman, 2003; House, 1999). In addition to minority status, higher kindergarten retentions rates have been associated with single parent status, ELL status, poverty and low maternal education (Mantizicopoulos et al. 1989). Finally, the research also draws a correlation between kindergarten readiness, poor performance in kindergarten and all of the aforementioned factors (Winsler, A. , Hutchison, L., & De Feyter, J. , 2012). Much like a never ending spiral, the student who is lacking in kindergarten readiness (often due to reduced exposure to formal and informal educational opportunities) is the same student who suffers the aforementioned environmental woes. Accordingly, the research is rich with data supporting the notion that students with backgrounds fostering strong intellectual, expressive, and social skills are more likely to adjust to kindergarten, perform well academically in later grades, and to finish school (Duncan, G., Dowsett, C., Claessens, A.; Magnuson, K., Huston, A., Klebanov, P., Pagani, L., Feinstein, L., Engel, M., Brooks-Gunn, J., Duckworth, K. & Japel, C., 2007; Entwisle & Alexander, 1999; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Tramontana, Hooper, & Selzer, 1988). In comparison, students are more likely to perform below expectations throughout all of their school years when they come from a home environment of low socio-economic status ((Duncan & Magnuson, 2005; Entwisle & Alexander, 1999; Janus & Duku, 2007). Thus, it is not surprising that programs such as Head Start were developed in the hopes of improving educational opportunities for children raised in low-income families (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007; Bogard & Takanishi, 2005).

At least one study (Blair, 2005) took a look at the risk-factors within a minority group to determine whether or not the risk for retention followed a distribution similar to the greater inter-racial population. The researcher reviewed 220 African American children who came from low-income households. Interestingly, this study showed that factors such as small size at birth, poor home exposure to intellectual stimulation, low IQ, externalizing behaviors, and type of day-care setting were *independently* found to be related to impacting the risk for grade retention. Also, it was the specific combination of factors that were more likely to put a child at risk for retention. For example, low IQ alone or small birth weight did not put an African American child at increased risk for retention; however, the combination of lower IQ with SGA (small gestation age) or externalizing behavior with out-of-home day care did significantly increase the likelihood that the child would be retained.

C. Does anyone benefit from retention?

In an attempt to gain credence for the potential benefits of kindergarten retention, some researchers have gone so far as to look at whether or not there may be particular kinds of children who were more likely to benefit from retention. For example, children with attention problems were the focus of a 1992 study (Manzicopoulos & Morrison). The study revealed that children with attention problems who were retained did show a decrease, specifically, in attention difficulties during the 2nd year of kindergarten as measured by the Revised Problem Checklist. However there was no improvement for this group in the area of academics. The evaluators concluded that these findings, “do not suggest that retention is an effective policy for the young at-risk child,” (p. 190) A second study conducted in 1997 (Manzicopolous) looked at the propensity for academic gains

and behavioral improvements for students with more generalized behavior difficulties. Here, not only was the evidence for support of a “gift of time” benefit not found in the academic arena, but the presence of behavioral difficulties also continued to be apparent. In fact, the evidence suggested that children with behavioral difficulties were at risk for further deleterious effects following retention. Additional research exploring this phenomenon was found when Wagner (1995) looked at a retained subgroup of children diagnosed as Learning Disabled (LD) and those with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (EBD). These children who had initially been retained as a first line of intervention were even more likely than their non-retained counterparts to drop out of school. This data showed about a 50% drop out rate for students classified as EBD who had been previously retained, and nearly a 33% drop out rate for students classified as LD who had previously been retained. This finding is in alignment with links between early grade retention and high school dropout rates being drawn frequently in the literature (Nasen, 1991). Researchers (Jimerson et al., 2002) have cited that the most relevant predictor variable of students who drop out is grade retention.

How Do Various School Members View Retention?

A. Factors of Importance to Teachers

The idea that students could benefit from the “gift of time” in order to acquire appropriate readiness skills is deeply rooted in educational philosophy, but goals emerging from the National Education Goals Panel (National Education Goals Panel, 1998) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002) re-emphasized this ideology. Even parents have held onto the ideology of the “gift of time” through academic redshirting when entrance into kindergarten is delayed (Graue &

Diperna, 2000). Thus, the conceptualization of time as an important remedy for early educational woes has and continues to play an important role in the framework of retention practices.

Despite research being disseminated in various ways to school teams, many teachers have been at the forefront of being resistant to applying research findings. Witmer, Hoffman and Nottis (2004) have offered the idea that rather than looking at research, teachers are more likely to believe in and practice grade retention due to factors such as peer influence, past practice, or administrative policy. One of the most popular reasons for retention cited by teachers in the past has been that it is a good intervention to support children who are socially immature. (Range et al., 2010). Teachers and other supporters of retention continue to adapt the mentality that early retention does result in positive outcomes and that it is better to provide this intervention in the early years rather than risk having to make a similar decision when a child is older. They believe that any stigma associated with retention is not found in the early grades and continue to believe that a sense of failure is not experienced by retained children (Shepard, 1989; Tomchin & Impara; 1992). Elementary school teachers tend to view retention as a formative, beneficial intervention. (Silbergliitt et al., 2006). Still, results of a mixed-method case study (Shepard, 1989) showed that even in the same school, teachers disagreed about whether or not retention had positive outcomes in the areas of achievement, behavior, social adjustment and self-concept. Overwhelmingly, the study supported the idea that teachers continue to retain students as an intervention to remediate academic failure. Although Shepard & Smith (1985) had previously shown that teachers tended to have varying beliefs about child development and preferred teaching strategies, teachers who

practiced in the same school were usually aligned in identifying the student characteristics of children who should be considered for retention. Despite the beliefs and perceptions of who should get retained, Jimerson and Kaufman (2004) identified the fact that rather than poor academic achievement and a “slow learner” profile, students were more likely to be retained when their parents had a lower IQ and when parents were less involved with school. The researchers pointed out that even when looking at students who are making slow progress and achieving below expectations, the children with bright, involved parents are less likely to be retained than their peer counterparts (Jimerson, S. & Kaufman, A., 2004).

A recent study (Range et al. 2012) showed concerns regarding academic performance as the primary reason for recommendations of retention. A qualitative study (Roberts, 2008) of teachers’ perceptions on grade retention was also conducted in recent years and included nineteen participants. In addition to the idea that early grade retention is preferred over later grade retention, participants identified missed opportunities of students’ learning, poor attention to those who are socially promoted, and missed opportunities for retained students to mature and build learning readiness as reasons for retaining students in the early years. An additional theme of interest was that negative views of retention in education were not consistent with society’s tolerant and even supportive view of retention. Perhaps the most concerning ideology shared by teacher who recommend retention is that there are no other compelling alternatives that will meet the needs of the students, as identified by the teachers (Lincove & Painter, 2006).

A study looking at whether or not there were any interventions that teachers identified as most likely impacting student outcomes, beyond retention, revealed

moderate effects sizes in relation to parent involvement, smaller class sizes, additional reading programs, direct instruction, private tutoring, special education, public school tutoring, personal learning plans, and mental health support. (Graue, M. E., & DiPerna, J. 2000). Results of interviews and review of rating scales found that teachers continue to believe that retention is a viable way of preventing future academic failure and that it is important to maintaining standards. Teachers in this study also believed that retention improves both self-concept and student attendance.

B. How do teachers interpret the data?

With all of the available research showing a range extending from no benefits to retention to harmful effects of retention, it is difficult to understand the reasons why teachers continue to support retention practices. Some teachers cite inconsistent testing results and poor research designs to support their claims. In fact, selection bias has been one of the issues raised by analysts looking at the reliability of Kindergarten retention studies (Allen, Chen, Wilson, Hughes; 2009). When attempting to establish firmly whether or not grade retention “caused” any of the measured outcomes, the absence of randomized experimental design (randomly assigning a child to a treatment or control group) has limited the conclusions that can be drawn (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002; West & Thoemmes, 2008). Inherently, it is relatively impossible to conduct a randomized control study of retention.

Despite the extreme difficulty in eliminating selection bias, Hong and Roudenbush (2005) used multi-level propensity score stratification to analyze data from the U.S. Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten cohort looking at schools who employed retention policies. The use of propensity scores allows researchers to

categorize individuals according to the likelihood that they were eligible for selection in a particular treatment. Thus, kindergarten students who were retained can be compared with those who were not retained, but who had all of the same general criteria and characteristics (including low academic performance) of their retained counterparts. Hong and Roudenbush's (2005) analysis revealed that kindergarten retention policies did not result in improved academic achievement (measured in reading and math) either for retained or for promoted students. That is, there were not significant differences found between the average reading and math scores of the group of students who had been retained under the policy, compared with those who had been promoted under the policy. The only conclusion of significance that was able to be drawn from the study was that retained students learned less than if they had been promoted. This conclusion was drawn when the rate of academic growth was examined. In this study, the average loss in academic growth for retained students was approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of a standard deviation. This translated into about a half year of growth compared with the expected full year of growth. In general, kindergarten retention seemed to have constrained learning potential. Hong and Roudenbush (2005) subsequently concluded that the practice of kindergarten retention, "impedes children's cognitive development over the repetition year" (p. 17). This notion lends support to previous calls for exposing children to developmentally appropriate intellectual challenges rather than forcing them to restart their education from the very beginning (Morrison et al. 1997).

Still, teachers who have the same student two years in a row witness the apparent improvement both in academics and in behavior for the child. This observation is consistent with the available research looking primarily at the short-term effects where

improved achievement is noted in retained children, compared with their classmates now in their first grade year (Anderson et al. 2005). This outcome is easy to understand. The long-term research conversely shows that this relative performance differential does not stay with the student in the long-term (Hong & Yu, 2008; Pierson & Connell, 1992). Therefore, even the benefits that are obtained are all for naught and have not addressed any of the real issues for the retained child. Another study (Wu, Hughes & West, 2008) found that retained children did show improvements either in the short or in the longer term, relative to promoted children in the areas of sadness/withdrawal, hyperactivity, and behavioral engagement. The researchers also reported higher academic competence in the retained children than in the matched, promoted children. Still, even with favorable results, the researchers (Wu et al. 2008) showed that some of the negative repercussions of retention may not necessarily appear until the middle grades. Researches further suggested that there could be harmful effects in the long run in the area of social acceptance as students and their peers became increasing aware of the previously retained student being over age. Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) addressed this by conducting a longitudinal study both of academic and of behavioral outcomes for retained students well into the adolescent years. They found no support for a significant advantage for retained students, compared with promoted students. Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) also highlighted the fact that a consistent finding has been the correlation between high school drop outs and a history of retention.

C. Characteristics of stakeholders

Although it is largely known that student achievement and demographics are directly linked to levels of retention, there has been less attention to the role of stakeholders in the process, including the model of leadership, school authority figures, the presence of minority leaders, and political views of the community. These findings suggest that retention is driven not only by characteristics of the students but also by beliefs, practices, and educational perceptions of various stakeholders within the macrostructure of the school system. Although retention is often viewed as a school-level decision made by principals and teachers, and sometimes even by parents, there have been periods of time when such decisions have been intensely influenced by systems rather than by committee members (Labaree, 1984). In the 1980s when the move toward raising educational standards was in its infancy, support for grade retention was perhaps at an all-time high. It may be well to recall that the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) outlined the need for intensifying curriculum while monitoring student achievement. (Mitchell & Encarnation, 1984; Murphy, 1990; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Even today, retention can be a preferred choice of conservative systems because monetary benefits can be gleaned, particularly in districts with a large proportion of minority students or those of low socio-economic status. Research has focused primarily on student outcomes when looking at the efficacy of research. However, policies of retention can also be tied to the beliefs and organizational practice of a district. Rather than a focus on the benefits of retention to the students, the focus becomes a concentration on the benefit to the district. Highly

conservative members may be attracted to eliciting public support, particularly when the district it serves has a high number of poor and minority students.

Although principals are generally thought to be a powerful constituent at both the building-level decision making as well as the greater macro system of the school, they are often influenced to make retention decisions despite their negative attitude about the practice in general. A qualitative study (Delconte, 2012) exploring the view of principals on retention found that principals would prefer building more effective instructional strategies and building teacher competencies as a primary means of avoiding retention. Some have also stressed the importance of access to funding allocated specifically to remediating struggling students appropriately.

How are retention decisions made?

A. Considerations for retention decisions

Sandoval (1984) suggests that the factors which seem to determine retentions are the opinion of the classroom teacher, discretion of the school principal, and parent consent. However, in all cases, whether formal policies or informal procedures are used, it is a decision supported more by precedent than by research (Gloekler, 1986). Some researchers (Winsler, Hutchison, De Feyter, & Jessica, 2012) have explored how school districts who do not have formal retention procedures can guide decision making through more informal procedures. They have shown that in order to make good decisions, there are three phases of consideration. First, the assessment phase occurs during data gathering during which both current and historical information is reviewed. In the 2nd phase, program planning, assessment data are carefully analyzed along with discussion and focus on potential intervening factors to success. At this juncture, appropriate

intervention strategies are considered and recommended. In the final phase, the team needs to determine the setting or combination of settings that would best help achieve the intended intensity of service intervention. Additionally, Brown (1989) recommends ongoing dialogue and progress review throughout the year so that the consideration of retention is not an unexpected event. Brown (1989) further recommends ongoing data gathering and formative evaluation in the form of classroom tests and quizzes, various work samples, checklists and anecdotal notes and information sharing. This type of data collection can serve to spark first lines of support for students in the form of differentiated instruction within the classroom.

Student Opinions

A. Results of qualitative studies

Perhaps one of the most unexplored outcomes of retention involves how the experience is processed by the students who have experienced retention. There are few studies that have examined this critical issue. A study conducted in 1987 by Yamamoto & Byrnes attempted to assess this by having sixth grade students with a previous experience of retention rate a series of stressful events, with retention being included. Only the loss of a parent and going were blind were found to be life events more stressful than retention. A duplicate study conducted in 2005 (Anderson et al.) turned the tables, revealing that retention was the most stressful life event.

In 2008, a similar study was conducted by those who had carried out the original research in 1987. This time, however, Byrnes and Yamamoto (2008) interviewed 71 retained elementary students and their teachers. They found an interesting mixture of student input ranging from no understanding about the reasons why he or she was

retained, to believing that he or she was bad and was being punished. At least one child was unwilling to disclose that she had been retained and even got her friend to “cover for her” during the interview process. When children were asked to identify a positive effect of retention, they reportedly struggled to answer. Twenty-one percent of retainees remarked that there was not anything good about it, and fifteen percent were able to identify making new friends as a positive outcome. Only five percent of retained students suggested that they were able to perform better during the retention year and less than five percent identified the facts that the work was easier or that they did not get in as much trouble. Clearly the perceptions of the interviewed students was not only negative, but was filled with gross misconceptions about the reasons why they were retained or how retention could be of benefit. Certainly, teachers would be interested and vested in hearing from students regarding their retention experiences. It is hypothesized that teachers who find that their former students have experienced negative or less than positive encounters with their retention events will change their beliefs in retention practices and they will be willing to embrace alternative intervention strategies.

According to Slavin, Karweit, and Madden (1989), some of these strategies might include implementing elementary school based prevention and early intervention programs; ensuring structured, well-organized, comprehensive approaches to instruction; reviewing quality of remedial programming, differentiated instruction, effective progress monitoring; and use of researched based practices designed for addressing struggling students. The need for better integration of regular education, remedial education, and special education is also suggested. Ray & Smith (2010) have emphasized the benefits of full-day Kindergarten programs. Although teachers often identify poor school readiness

as a significant risk factor for incoming students, it will be essential for them to assess more succinctly the environment that they have created in their own classrooms that do or do not support student success. It is essential that teachers, building administrators, teachers, policy makers, and stakeholders “ready the schools” to address the ever growing, dynamic influx of a wide range of learners. (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005).

Chapter 3

Methods

Participants

Eleven students participated in this qualitative study by responding to a series of 9-open ended questions regarding experiences of retention. The participants consisted of 5 male students and 6 female students. Seven of the students had been retained in their kindergarten year (five females/two males) and four of the students have been retained in their 1st grade year (three males/one female). The current grade placement of the students interviewed included four 1st graders, one 2nd grader, two 3rd graders, two 5th graders, and two 6th graders.

Data were collected by interviewing school-aged children who had experienced either a 1st grade or a Kindergarten retention. Children's participation in the research, as approved through the Institutional Review Board application and protocol process, was elicited initially through a "Call for Research Participants" that was posted in monthly newsletters through Parent/Teacher Organizations and Home/School Organizations in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. The number of school entities that were willing to post the "Call for Research Participants" was small (<3) and did not result in finding eligible participants. Children's participation in the research was next elicited through a "Call for Research Participants" that was posted for an advertisement fee in 4 major papers in the Montgomery County, Bucks County, Wayne County, and Pike County areas of Pennsylvania. The revision of this data collection process was approved by the Institutional Review Board. The research advertisement ran for two weeks in the papers, but did not result in finding eligible participants. The final revision for attempting to elicit

potential candidates outlined placing a “Call for Research Participants” on public Face Book sites (See Appendix A). The advertisement was sent to parents of elementary-aged children in the state of Pennsylvania. Parents/students who were interested in participating were directed to contact the researcher through a secure email address. Students could participate in the study if they were between the ages of 6-12, resided in Pennsylvania, and had experienced a retention during either their Kindergarten or their 1st grade years. The study was open to students who were currently or had been during their retention year, educated in a public, private, parochial, or a charter school. Children who were homeschooled were not excluded from the study, but there was a concern that these children might have different experiences surrounding the experience of retention, given the uniqueness of their individualized curriculums and learning environments. (Ray, 1990). However, none of the volunteers that came forward had a history of being homeschooled. There were no exclusionary criteria related to gender, race, religious preference, socio-economic status, educational level of parent, ethnicity, or school setting (i.e. urban, suburban, or rural). Neither were these variables recorded in the demographic data collected. A total of 11 eligible elementary school aged children volunteered to participate in the research study and the Facebook advertisement remained posted until the properties of theoretical categories were saturated with data. Saturation of data was achieved when theoretical categories no longer yielded new properties and these same properties supported evidence of patterns in the data (Glaser, 1978, Holton, 2007).

The research study took place over a period of four months during which interviews were conducted, emerging data were collected and coded, data and codes were compared, and categories for driving theory were developed. Potential participants

responded to the Facebook advertisement through a secured email address, stating their intention to participate. Basic eligibility criteria were highlighted, methods of participation outlined (list of approved library sites or phone interview), and opportunities to ask questions or voice concerns was provided. Fifteen potential participants responded to the Facebook advertisement. Four of the respondents were found to be ineligible to participate in the study due to age restrictions. Three were adults who expressed the fact that they had failed a grade during their school years and they were interested in sharing their stories. A fourth respondent was the mother of a high school student who wanted to confirm whether or not her child would be ineligible to participate *as per* the advertisement. After a potential participant was “cleared” for eligibility, copies of the Assent form and the Parent Consent form were emailed to parents for review prior to the established interview date. Hard copies of these same forms were brought to interview sites and were signed “in person” after participants/parents of participants were once again provided with opportunities to ask any questions or address any concerns. Nine of the interviews took place in public libraries, as outlined in the approved procedures and two of the interviews took place via phone. Signatures for consent/assent for phone interviews were accepted via electronic submission. At the beginning of the phone interviews, participants/parents of participants were provided with opportunities to ask any questions or address any concerns. All participants received \$15 Visa gift cards, which were scheduled to be provided, whether or not they completed the study. All eleven eligible volunteers answered all study questions. Although a list of counseling resources was provided should a participant experience any distress or discomfort at any

point within or following the interview process, there were no reports of negative reactivity, and emotional distress was not observed.

Overview of Research Design

When research attempts to provide theory about how people interpret significant life events and the contributing factors concerning the reasons why these events are so perceived, grounded theory is often a preferred methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory (Miller, Bonner, Francis, 2006) begins with an inductive process whereby data are analyzed as they emerge from the personal account of events, as told from the perspective of the research participant. Information is translated into codes that can be further transformed into categories for comparison and analyzation. A method of “constant comparing” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) lays the groundwork for the development of theories. Theories are meant to describe the experiences of research participants in similar life events. In this study, the experiences of children who have repeated Kindergarten or 1st grade were used to drive theoretical development. Stemming from the emergence of grounded theory in sociology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to the extension of the traditional grounded theory of Glaser (1992) and even the evolved grounded theory of Strauss and Corbin (1998), the constructivist approach recognizes that an element of subjectivity is inherent in the analysis and interpretation of data (Charmaz, page 14). The constructivist approach was applied during the interview process, focused coding and thematic analysis, theoretical sampling, and sorting of components into an integrated theoretical statement.

Measures. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview process consisting of nine questions. The first two questions provided reliability (Did you repeat Kindergarten or 1st grade?) and demographic information (What grade are you in now?). The next four questions were designed to elicit the child's perceptions about the reasons why the retention occurred; the manner in which the information was conveyed and who was involved; specific recollections about the experience; and feelings about the retention experience. A strict adherence to the wording of the questions was followed, but queries were introduced when information provided was unclear and did not appear to address the intended question. Questions seven and eight provided a platform for children to comment or make judgments about ways in which the experience could have or should have gone differently. Specifically, question eight provided participants with the opportunity to give advice to other children preparing for a retention. Finally, question nine was designed to elicit whether or not there were any ongoing or any new challenges that were being experienced in the child's current year by asking if he/she was now receiving any "special help at school".

Procedures

Parents of potential participants who responded to the public Facebook advertisement sent an email of interest to the Researcher. The Researcher explained the purpose of the study and the fact that participants would be interviewed at a local library of their choice (taken from a list of designated libraries outlined in the IRB application procedures). If a library site was chosen, a date and time was agreed upon. Parents also had the option to have their child interviewed by phone. This option was utilized in two scenarios. Transportation was a barrier in one situation and a lengthy

travel distance to any of the pre-determined libraries was a barrier in another situation. A copy of the consent/assent forms was emailed to parents/participants for review. These forms were signed in the presence of the researcher for those who participated in an interview conducted at a library. Electronic signatures were accepted for the two phone interviews. A private area of the library was secured for most interviews, but two interviews were conducted in semi-private areas when multiple events were being hosted in the library at that particular day and time. The researcher interviewed children in one session that lasted about fifteen minutes, on average. The researcher explained to each participant that nine questions would be asked and if there were any questions he or she did not want to answer, he or she was not required to do so. Children were also told that they could discontinue the study at any time and that they would be able to keep the Visa gift card. Visa gift cards were handed to parents following introductions and signing of consent/assent forms. Visa gift cards were mailed to participants after the interviews had taken place in cases in which participants had participated via phone.

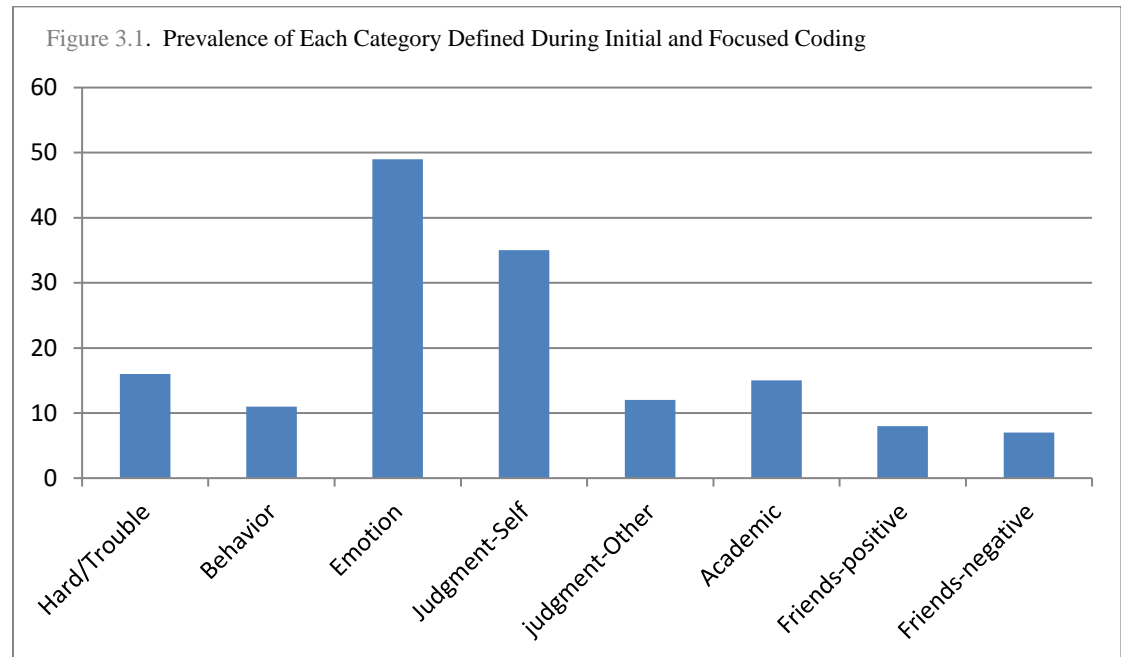
At the onset of the formal interview process, a Norcom 2440 Professional minicassette dictator was used and notes were taken by the examiner to facilitate the process in a fluent manner. The tapes were kept in a locked file cabinet until they were transcribed for data analysis. The tapes were then destroyed. One or more of the parents were also present at all interviews. For interviews that took place in the library, parents had the option to remain in the vicinity of the area where the interview was taking place, but were asked not to answer for or to prompt their child in any way. Two parents remained “nearby”, but the parents of the seven other children tended to peruse the library or engage with siblings of the participant. In phone interviews, it was assumed

parents were nearby. In these cases, parents likely could not hear the questions being asked, but they could hear the responses of their child. There was no evidence, during the interviews, of parent interference that might compromise the validity of their child's responses.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the data analysis process, the researcher utilized the three steps of the constructivist theory of coding including initial coding, focused coding, and development of thematic constructs. First, in the initial coding process, main ideas that immediately emerged were highlighted and placed into a database. Questions 1 and 2 were coded for the purpose of organizing demographic information; responses to the remaining seven questions were coded one at a time as the researcher carefully read through the transcribed responses given by each participant. Focused coding is the second major phase in constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 138), and it was used to provide an avenue for sifting, sorting, synthesizing and analyzing the data to determine the significance and emergence of patterns within the initial coding process. At this level of analysis, these codes tend to appear more frequently or it may be that they then begin to emerge as having more significance than other codes. Focused coding initially highlighted eight key categories, including participants often mentioning having "trouble" or the school year being "hard"; mentions of behavior, emotion, or academic standings; judgments participants assigned to themselves or judgments they inferred that had come from others, and mention of friends and relationships. Immediately, a pattern was evolving with only these 8 categories being coded a total of 153 times across 11

respondents. Figure 3.1 displays how these categories were dispersed following the initial and focused coding processes.



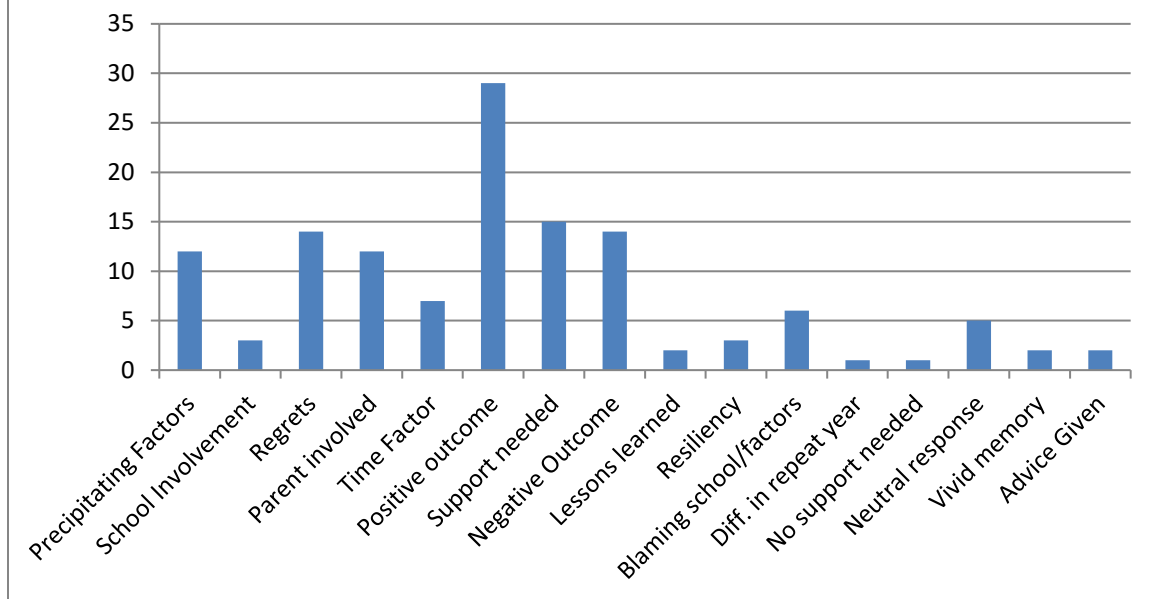
Following the initial and focused coding process and review of tentative categories, the comparative process was used to establish if the directions that the categories were taking helped to clarify the theoretical centrality of ideas that were emerging from the data. Revisiting the database, established categories were broken into sub-categories that helped to pave the way for the emergence of a deeper, theoretical coding as is a condition of the constructivist grounded theory approach to analysis. Charmaz (2011, page 150) identifies theoretical coding as a sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes the researcher has selected during focused coding. These codes were not only essential in being able to conceptualize how substantive codes were related within the initial categories, but they were also instrumental in helping to move analysis of the data into a theoretical construct. Coded categories and themes emerged from

multiple reviews of the transcripts and databases that contributed to a systematic analysis of the thoughts, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of students who had previously been retained in Kindergarten or 1st grade. Ultimately, the entire distribution of thematic constructs were analyzed in order to support the evolution of a core construct driving theoretical implications.

Themes that were analyzed in order to move toward a core construct of analysis included themes of resiliency/confidence, importance of friendships, how children construct self-evaluation, tendency to attribute external factors, reasons for retention, feelings of regret, wide range of emotions, and the overall general uncertainty of the reason for the retention.

In all, a total of 26 coded categories and themes were created that provided a systematic analysis of the thoughts, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of students who had previously been retained in Kindergarten or 1st grade. Figure 3.2 displays the entire distribution of thematic constructs that were reviewed and analyzed in order to support the evolution of a core construct driving theoretical implications.

Figure 3.2. Thematic Constructs



Chapter 4: RESULTS

Findings

Discussion of findings. The research findings are presented in the context of demographic findings and descriptive findings. Demographic findings consist of the year in which a retention occurred (Kindergarten or 1st grade), current grade of the participant, and whether or not participants were receiving supportive services at the time of the interview. The descriptive section provides summaries of the categories and thematic elements that emerged in the context of the constructive grounded theory process of analysis. Grounded theory (Miller, Bonner, Francis, 2006) begins with an inductive process, whereby data are analyzed as they emerge from the personal account of events as told from the perspective of the research participant. Information is translated into codes that can be further transformed into categories for comparison and analysis. A method of “constant comparing” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) lays the groundwork for the development of theories. Theories are meant to describe the experiences of research participants in similar life events. In this study, the experiences of children who have repeated Kindergarten or 1st grade were used to drive theoretical development. Stemming from the emergence of grounded theory in sociology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to the extension of the traditional grounded theory of Glaser (1992) and even the evolved grounded theory of Strauss and Corbin (1998), the constructivist approach recognizes that an element of subjectivity is inherent in the analysis and interpretation of data (Charmaz, page 14). The constructivist approach was applied during the interview process and included focused coding, thematic analysis, and sorting of components into an integrated theoretical statement.

Demographic findings. The participants in this study were eleven elementary school aged children who had experienced a retention either in their Kindergarten or in their 1st grade years. Participants also reported about whether or not they were currently receiving any supportive services at school. Of the eleven participants, six were female and five were male. Seven of the participants were retained in Kindergarten and six of the participants were retained in the 1st grade. The current grade placement of participants included two 2nd graders, one 3rd grader, two 4th graders, three 5th graders, and three 6th graders. All but one of the participants identified themselves as being involved in supportive services. Four of the children described emotional support type services and five children described the more academic support services. One child described working in small groups, but did not specify the nature of the group. A distinction about which of these services had been provided through special education or through regular education was not obtained. Table 1 reports the descriptive findings of the participants.

Table 1
Descriptive Findings of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Grade at time of Retention	Current Grade	Support services
#1	Female	K	2 nd	Academic
#2	Male	1 st	6 th	Emotional
#3	Male	K	5 th	Emotional
#4	Male	1 st	5 th	Academic
#5	Female	K	3 rd	Academic
#6	Female	1 st	4 th	Emotional
#7	Female	K	6 th	Emotional
#8	Male	K	2 nd	Academic
#9	Female	K	5 th	Academic
#10	Female	K	6 th	No support
#11	Male	1 st	4 th	Unspecified Non-academic Group support

Descriptive Findings. Following the demographic questions 1. Did you repeat a grade? and question 2. What grade are you in now?, the first open-ended question in the semi-structured interview was designed to elicit each child’s understanding of the reason *why* he or she repeated the grade. Some participants identified an academic issue such as, “I had trouble knowing my letters and numbers”, or “I had to learn English.” Less specific academic issues were also mentioned such as, “I felt like I was behind on my work.” Other participants described behavioral difficulties. A 6th grade female shared the

fact that, “I would run around and get into trouble.” Another 6th grade student, a male, seemed uncertain but offered, “I guess because I would get into fights with kids and stuff.” Another young boy, currently in 4th grade, paused in response, “Let me think about this.” He offered a myriad of responses as he continued to answer, including, “my behavior”; “I got upset a lot”; “I cried sometimes”, and “I didn’t like my teacher.” As seen in this youngster’s response, emotional indicators were also present in the answers of other participants. A 5th grade male described, “It became overwhelming”, and “a lot of pressure.” A 6th grade female shared, “My mom says that I was really shy.” At least one child believed that his retention was due to his age. This 5th grade boy offered, “My parents said I went to school too early.” Another child responded by saying, “I was sick a lot of days, and I missed too many days of school.” At least three of the participants struggled to provide a cohesive response.

A 4th grade female who repeated 1st grade responded,

1st grade is hard. It’s not like Kindergarten when you play all day. You have to do hard stuff and pay attention. Sometimes I would run around and get in trouble and I don’t think my teacher liked me very much. She was always like, “Celia, you don’t know how to act like a 1st grader.” I think she thought I should have stayed in Kindergarten, but I didn’t.”

In addition to children identifying specific reasons why they thought the retention occurred, participants were observed to make comments that seemed to represent judgments that they had either placed on themselves or that they derived from other significant figures.

Judgments. Judgments made by self, judgments made by others, and at least one judgment directed at others in the child's educational experience emerged early as a category in the coding process. A 3rd grade female stated, "I was supposed to know English I guess." A 4th grade female stated, "I don't think my teacher liked me very much." A 2nd grade male referenced his peers at the time of retention and drew the conclusion that, "They did better at being a smart Kindergartener." Still another student placed judgment on others. This 6th grade male commented, "There were mean kids at my school."

The finding out process. For the fourth question, participants were asked to describe how they found out that they would be repeating the grade. They were asked to recall who told them and what was said to them. Through the method of constant comparison, participants were observed once again to mention behavioral or emotional concerns within the context of their answer to this question. A 4th grade male recounted, "She (the school principal) said if I wasn't good, then I shouldn't go on to the next grade." A 5th grade male spontaneously shared, "I was thinking how overwhelmed and nervous I was about 1st grade." Self-judgments were also expressed once again. A 3rd grade female stated, "I really couldn't learn anything." She also seemed to place blame on the environment by sharing, "Kindergarten was crazy." A 4th grade male surmised, "I guess I wasn't good." Mention of things being "hard" or having nonspecific "troubles" were intertwined with responses. This pattern of language was also seen in participants' responses to questions three and four. A 6th grade male recalled, "I remember she (the school principal) said it's better to go to 1st grade again than to have more trouble in 2nd grade."

A review of persons identified in the process of communicating that a retention was recommended finds that mothers were involved most often and were cited a total of 7x. A general reference to parents occurred 4x times and teachers and principals were each identified 1x. One child referenced his dad as being involved in the “talk”, and another child mentioned her grandmother. Through the method of constant comparison, the category of friendships was introduced for the first time as participants responded to the question about how they found out they would be retained.

Friendships. For the first time in the interview process, participants began to mention social interactions and friendships as a factor in their retention experiences. A 6th grade male student who was retained in 1st grade shared that, “The Principal said that I needed to find a better way to get along with my friends.” Mention of friendships became even more common as participants responded to question five in the semi-structured interview. This question was designed to tap a participant’s memories of things he or she remembered about repeating the grade. Some of the children made positive remarks such as, “I met new friends and still had some of my old friends.” Another child commented, “The kids were much nicer”, and a 3rd grade female, who had attributed her English as a Second Language status to her retention, shared, “There were other kids in my class who spoke Russian too, ya know. I liked talking to them and making friends with them.” Some participants, however, shared some negative recollections about friendships. A 4th grade female stated, “All my friends were looking at me and they were like, “Why are you in *Mrs. Neil’s class?” A 5th grade female shared, “It was like we didn’t know each other anymore.”

Reflections on Feelings. Although reflections on feelings were already beginning to emerge within the responses provided to the first few questions, participants were specifically asked in question six to share how they *felt* about their retention experiences. Both of the 2nd graders, who had repeated Kindergarten, shared mixed feelings. The female participant stated, “It was good and I liked it”, but when prompted further responded, “I was bored and I was like, I already learned this.” The male participant shared that he was “happy”, but also commented, “I was ascaresd of going to 1st grade ‘cause you have to be really smart and I wasn’t that smart yet.” A 3rd grade female felt that repeating was a good experience because she “learned how to speak English and understand stuff better. I got used to speaking English faster.” The two 4th graders who participated in the study shared more negative recounts about their experiences. The female participant shared, “I don’t mind it as much now, but I didn’t like it. It made me sad.” The male student at first offered, “Uh, like fine”, but spontaneously added, “I wouldn’t want to repeat 4th grade though.” When queried further, he stated, “Everyone would know that I’m stupid. I’m not, but if you fail a grade two times, duh, what else are kids gonna think?” A female participant, now in grade 5, summarized the thought that, “I’m fine with it now. I think it helped me. It just felt weird at first.” Of the two 5th grade males in the study, the first responded that he felt “Good, more successful.” The other student also said that he felt “good” and that he “learned a lot more.” He also recounted that, “I wasn’t ready (to go to 1st grade) and I was frustrated in Kindergarten.”

The viewpoints shared by the three 6th grade students were more positive. The first stated, “I think it helped me because I just had a lot of trouble the first time (pause) and when I did Kindergarten again I really learned a lot.” The other 6th grade female in

the study replied “Great” but the 6th grade boy said, slowly and hesitantly, “I feel OK, (pause) it was good.” When queried whether or not he had any other feelings, he again replied, “No, I’m good.”

Should things have gone differently? For question seven, participants were asked to think about whether or not there was anything he or she might have changed about any aspect of their retention experiences. A 5th grade male quickly answered, “I don’t think I would change anything”, although he continued his response by saying, “but you know, it was awkward trying out for basketball.” When asked to explain further, he shared, “Everyone knew how old I was and they said a 4th grader shouldn’t be on the team. Like when it was all 5th graders. But I was old enough and it goes by age.” A 6th grade male offered, “I guess I would change maybe that I could have just went to 2nd grade with everyone else.” When asked if there were anything he would change besides not repeating the grade, he responded simply, “I don’t know. I guess not.” Another 5th grade male expressed a high level of satisfaction with his grade repetition and shared, “No, I liked 1st grade. When I repeated it, it was one of my best years.” A female in the 6th grade also would not have changed anything and responded by saying, “No (thoughtful pause), I was happy to make friends with lots of kids. I met my best friend that year (big smile).” Still another female in the 5th grade relayed, “No I wouldn’t change anything about it that I can think of.”

Retention Regrets. Not all responses, however, were as positive or as middle of the road. For the first time, the matter of regret was first observed to emerge in response to question seven, amidst more neutral responses. A female currently in 2nd grade reflected, “I wish it didn’t take me so long to learn.” Another female student, now in the

3rd grade, remarked “I wish I could have known more about English in the beginning.”

Later, the same participant added, “It would have been probably easier and nicer if more kids could speak the same language as me.” A 2nd grade male responded, “I wished that all my friends could stay with me. It was like I would see them sometimes on the playground and they would still play with me, but I was playing with my new friends too. But yea I didn’t like that my friends weren’t in my class anymore.” A 6th grade female who had been retained in Kindergarten expressed disappointment about her reading experiences in the repeat year by saying, “I think I should have been able to do more challenging things. That would have been better. I mean I could read the books I wanted to read, but I also had to read these little kiddie books.” A 4th grade male seemed to suggest that he might not have failed 1st grade if he had adequate supports in place sooner. He responded by saying, “Maybe if *Mr. Smith was allowed to help me with stuff when I was first there, I could have controlled by bad feelings and not have to do a whole extra year.” A resilient 4th grade female who had previously noted she, “Didn’t mind it (repeating) so much now” expressed what could be characterized as embarrassment. She stated, “I don’t like that everyone knows. Everyone looks at me and they know I should be in 4th grade. I mean I’m the tallest kid in the 4th grade. Even taller than the boys.”

Focused analysis of this emergent theme revealed that feelings of regret were embedded within responses to even earlier questions. Combing through previous responses, it was discovered that a female 4th grade participant had mentioned in her recount about how she learned she would be retained in 1st grade, “I think like I wasn’t surprised, but if I tried harder and listened better, I guess I probably could have done

better. Maybe I should have been better.” In response to the same question, a 5th grade female had stated, “I felt like if I really wanted to go to 1st grade (rather than repeating Kindergarten), maybe they would have said yes.” This statement seemed to suggest a regret for not having spoken up for herself.

Advice for others about to face a retention. The next question in the interview process asked participants to reflect on any advice that he or she might offer to other kids who may be facing a grade retention. This question elicited a combination of good things to look forward to, supportive encouragement, and warnings. The idea of friendships and making friends was identified by three of the respondents. A 2nd grader said, “Have fun meeting new friends” and also offered, “Try to learn as much as you can.” A 5th grader also stated, “You will make even more friends.” She then added more positive words saying, “You will become really smart in reading and you will be happy you did it.” This youngster also offered encouragement by sharing, “In the beginning, you might feel a little strange or uncomfortable, but don’t be scared.” A final participant highlighted friends by saying, “You will probably learn a lot and make more friends,” Still other respondents offered different confident words of advice. A 2nd grader who thought repeating the grade was a very positive experience recommended that others “Have fun cause once you are done with Kindergarten, you will miss it.” A 4th grader remarked, “You will do better and it will be worth it.”

The remaining six respondents took a more cautious approach. Three of these participants, two male and one female, encouraged those who might potentially be retained not to “worry” or be “upset”. One of these respondents, a 6th grade student, warned “Just remember why you have to do it and don’t let it happen again.” Another 6th

grade student expressed, “They might be scared.” She reasoned however, “I would say if they went to the next grade, it might be too hard.” Conflicted, this same participant also decided, “If they repeat, they might be bored.” She advised, “They should really think about whether it is a good idea.” The 5th grader emphasized, “Don’t be upset and you will get used to it in no time.” Still other participants offered more specific advice. A 4th grade male offered, “If you do get upset, don’t get mad and cry.” A 4th grade female warned, “Don’t fool around.” Through the constant comparing method, themes of regret were also embedded within some of the responses to question eight. The same young girl who warned potential candidates for retention not to fool around, also included a statement of, “You don’t want to repeat 1st grade again”, shedding further light on her wishes that she did not have this particular experience.

Resiliency. For the first time in the process of analysis, the idea of resiliency came to light. The female 6th grader who had remarked, “Don’t worry, it isn’t bad to repeat,” also added, “You just have to remember there is a good reason for everything.” In the comparative process, the researcher looked through the other analyzed responses to all preceding questions and observed that this theme occurred throughout other responses as well. The 4th grade female discussed previously, who expressed her feelings in response to retention as, “I don’t mind it now, but I didn’t like it,” decidedly also showed resiliency. A 5th grade student who had described her feelings about retention as, “weird at first” also shared that, “I’m fine with it now and I think it helped me.”

Problems persisting post-retention. In order to gain insight about whether or not students who were previously retained were currently receiving any supportive services, the final interview question asked participants to identify whether or not they were

receiving any special kinds of help at school. One student was in “writing club” for writing; one was getting reading assistance, and a third child was getting both reading and writing help. Two of the participants were receiving support in math and only one participant out of the eleven indicated she did not receive any special support services. Five of the participants, however, described support for emotional challenges including nervousness, anger, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Within the context of answering this question, resiliency and confidence were evident once again. A 6th grade male who shared that he participated in a group that helps kids with their feelings offered that, “I use to get really angry, but I’m much better now. I don’t get angry (pauses), or if I do, I calm down quicker and faster.” A 2nd grade male, who was currently involved in “reading workshop”, identified himself as, “I’m a really good reader.” A 5th grade female who was “in *Mrs. Land’s class for math” distinguished her math strengths as, “good with multiplying numbers” and “good with math facts.” She was proud to share that sometimes she went into *Mrs. Casey’s 2nd grade class and that she helped struggling students with math.

Themes that were analyzed in order to move toward a core construct of analysis included themes of resiliency/confidence, importance of friendships, how children construct self-evaluation, tendency to attribute external factors to reasons for retention, feelings of regret, wide range of emotions, and the overall general uncertainty of the reason for the retention.

*Names have been changed to maintain strict confidentiality

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

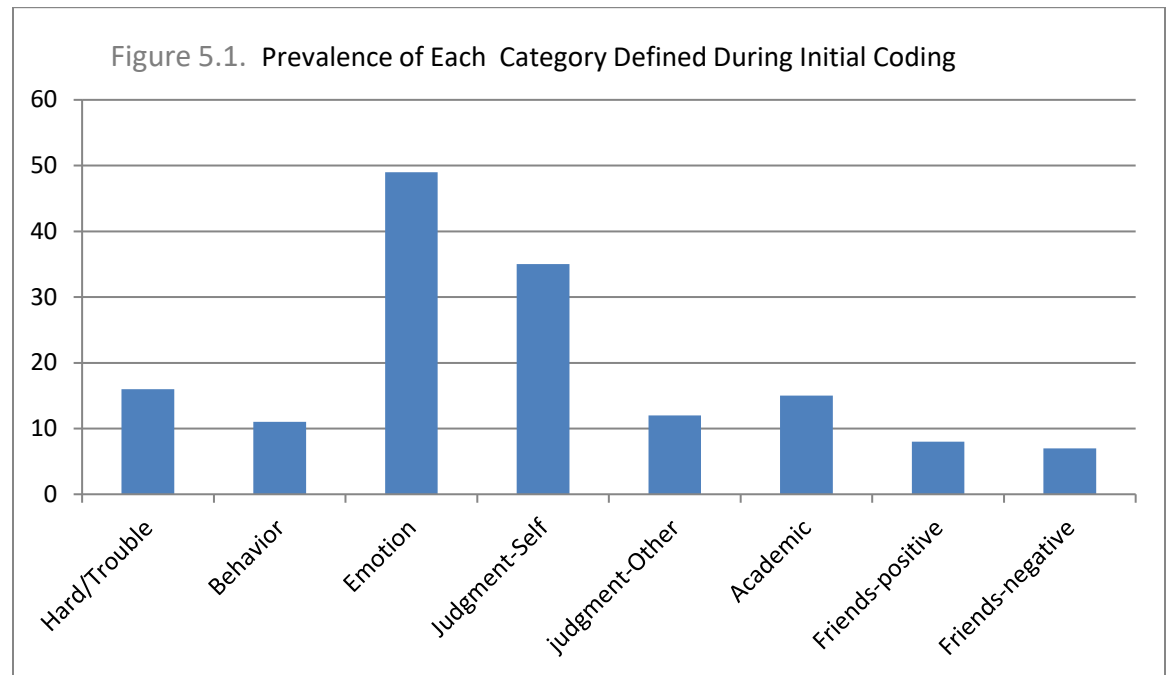
Overview

The goal of the current study was to understand how children process and evaluate retention decisions, given copious amounts of previous research showing a connection between the experience of retention and risks of impact on children's self-perceptions and their social-emotional development (Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Dauber S., 2003; Bonvin, P., Bless, G., & Schuepbach, M., 2008; Burkam, D. T., LoGerfo, L., Ready, D., & Lee, V. E., 2007; Jimerson, S. R., Ferguson, P., Whipple, A., Anderson, G., & Dalton, M., 2002; Jimerson, S. R., & Ferguson, P. 2007). Young children, in particular, are forced to experience a significant life event that they may struggle to understand and to resolve successfully (Hong, G., Yu, B. 2008; Mantzicopoulos, P. & Morrison, D., 1992; Wu, W., West, S., Hughes, J. 2010). Providing children who have experienced retention with the opportunity to verbalize personal thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and essential details is practically non-existent in the current literature and it is a perspective of insight and understanding that could never be adequately fulfilled through correlational studies or highly structured, closed questionnaires. A qualitative study of this nature gives a voice to the children and allows for deeper insight into the impact of retention decisions on the most important stakeholders: the children themselves. It is this level of insight that is needed to guide stakeholders in effective decision making practices when the possibility of retention is on the table. Gaining insight into the perceptions in which previously retained children "see"

their world is of great value to the vast community of stakeholders supporting the educational development of children.

Summary of the Findings

A total of 11 participants completed interviews for this study. All of these participants were elementary school aged children who had experienced either a Kindergarten or 1st grade retention. Their responses to seven open-ended questions regarding their experiences with retention generated several common themes and patterns. As noted in the methods section and sustained in the results section, initial and focused coding revealed patterns of participants describing academic difficulties, behavior problems, emotional challenges, non-specific struggles (i.e. “trouble”, “hard”), self-judgments, and importance and impact of friendships and relationships. Judgments were further broken down between judgments children placed on themselves or judgments that children projected from others. During the initial coding process, a pattern of responding related to these emerging codes was tabulated a total of 153 times across 11 respondents. Figure 5.1 displays how these categories were dispersed following the initial and focused coding processes.



Following the initial and focused coding process that occurred in the question/response analysis, subsequent categories and subcategories emerged during the second, third, and fourth critical review that supported the development of deeper, theoretical coding as is a condition of the constructivist grounded theory approach to analysis. These codes not only helped to conceptualize how substantive codes were related, but were also instrumental in helping to move analysis of the data into a theoretical construct. Thematic constructs were reviewed and analyzed in order to support the evolution of a core construct driving theoretical implications.

Discussion of Thematic Constructs

Several overall themes emerged throughout an analysis of the findings in this qualitative study that marked the phenomenon of how children who have been retained process and evaluate their experiences of retention. First, some positive outcomes were identified; some students came away from the retention experience feeling more confident and resilient. Second, the influence of friends and friendships within the

context of the retention experience was important and involved both positive and negative experiences. Third, students experience a wide variety of emotions when they reflect on struggles experienced prior to their retentions, their thoughts and experiences when they learned they would be retained, and their experiences during the retention year. Fourth, students tend to introduce both positive and negative judgments about themselves and judgments projected from others. Fifth, students did not always attribute retentions to something within their control and would blame retention on precipitating factors or school/environmental factors. The “gift of time” was sometimes identified as a justification for retention. In all these cases, the idea of the gift of time was introduced by others and then assimilated into the child’s schema about the reasons why he or she was retained. Sixth, the theme of regret emerged and many students wished they had behaved differently or had done certain things differently. Seventh, the overall outcome of the retention experience is not clear-cut. Positive, neutral, and negative outcomes were described and interwoven amongst responses. Finally, despite most of the participants identifying the reason for retention, careful analysis of comments throughout the interview process and a model of “reasons identified” compared with “reasons suspected” (based on current supports in place) further suggests that students do not have a clear understanding of the reason for their retention.

Increased confidence and resiliency. Certainly a positive outcome of the retention experience were themes of increased confidence and resiliency. When asked how she felt about having repeated Kindergarten, a 6th grade female responded, “It think it helped me because I just had a lot of trouble the first time. And when I did Kindergarten again, I really learned a lot.” When later asked what advice she would give

to another child about to repeat Kindergarten, she offered, “Don’t worry, it isn’t bad to repeat. You have to remember there is a good reason for everything.” Another 6th grade female specifically identified, “I was a lot more confident. I already knew most of the other things that the other kids were learning. I knew how to read already. I was good at writing and I was always good at art.” “A 5th grade male shared, “The second year, I learned a lot more...how I could get over my feelings (of being overwhelmed).” The same participant also shared, “I learned to read.” Another 5th grade male who was asked to share his recollections about repeating 1st grade described the experience as “really good” and explained that, “I did much better in school; I got better grades, and things made more sense.” When asked specifically to describe his feelings about repeating the year, he simply responded, “Good, more successful.” Finally, a 2nd grade female recounted, “I learned to read and write better.”

Impact of friendships and peer differences. The impact of friendships was a theme that emerged quickly in the coding and categorization process. Participants referred to friends in their first Kindergarten or in their first 1st grade experiences and in their retention experiences. A 6th grade male who repeated Kindergarten noted improvement in his peer group when he mentioned “The kids were much nicer” in his second year of Kindergarten. A 6th grade female shared, “I was happy to make friends with lots of kids.” With a big smile on her face, she recounted, “I made my best friend that year.” Friendships were in balance for a 5th grade male student during the first year and retention year. He reported that, “I met new friends and still had some of my old friends”. Similarly, a 2nd grade female reflected, “Yea, I made a lot of friends. I still had my other friends and I would see them sometimes.” Conversely, another 2nd grade female

was somewhat more conflicted with leaving her old friends and meeting new friends. She explained, “I wished that all my friends could stay with me. It was like I would see them sometimes on the playground. Um, I mean they would still play with me (pause), but I was playing with my new friends too. But yea, I didn’t like that my friends weren’t in my class anymore.”

The friendship factor became more difficult for other participants. A 5th grade female recalled the social challenges when she was asked to reflect on anything she remembered about repeating Kindergarten.

I remember it was kinda strange. My little neighbor was in my class and I was always older than her and now we were in school together. I mean, everyone in my class went across the hall, except me, I stayed back. Um, sometimes I think some of the kids would laugh at me. My friends were still nice to me, in a way, but it was like we didn’t know each other anymore

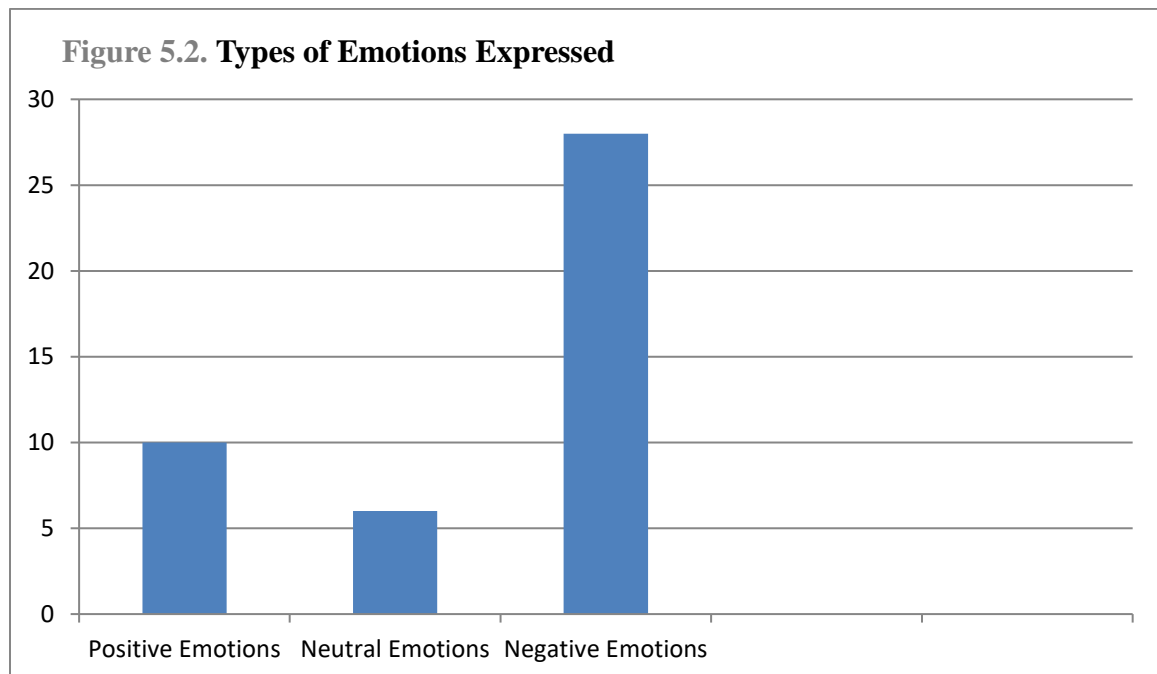
The challenge of changing peer groups was also noted by a 5th grade male who shared that, “I had to be around a lot younger kids. I was older and they look at you differently.” He further explained about the “awkwardness” of trying out for basketball. “Everyone knew how old I was and they said a 4th grader shouldn’t be on the team, like when it was all 5th graders, but I was old enough and it goes by age.”

The factor of friendship was also important when participants were asked to offer advice to others. A 2nd grade boy offered, “You will make even more friends.” A 2nd grade girl advised “Have fun making new friends” and another 3rd grade girl encouraged, “You will probably make more friends.”

Wide variety of emotions. Previous studies (Anderson, G. E., Jimerson, S. R., & Whipple, A. D. 2005; Byrnes, D. A., 1989; Yamamoto, K., & Byrnes, D.A., 1987) have shown that even the idea of experiencing a retention proves stressful for school students. The current study revealed that students' experiences with retentions are unique and often encompass a wide range of emotions and thoughts about their experiences. One of the ways in which the nature of the participants' experiences were evaluated was through analysis of words used by the children when reflecting on emotional reactivity to any aspect of the experiences. As seen in Figure 5.1, it is clear that use of emotional words occurred at a very high frequency (nearly 50 times). When using this information to begin evaluating whether respondents had a positive, negative, or neutral response to retention, it was first essential to make decisions about the kinds of emotions being displayed. The use of emotional words was found throughout the interview process and not necessarily in direct response to question six (How do you feel about having repeated the grade?). Rather, these feeling words were interwoven in student responses to each of the other six questions tapping participants' ability to identify the reason for retention, how they found out retention would occur, general memories, things they would have changed, advice they would give to other kids about to repeat a grade, and discussion about the presence of support services.

In many cases, a variety of feeling words were expressed throughout a single interview and some feeling words were used repeatedly in response to different questions. For example, one participant offering advice to a student who might potentially be retained, said that repeating a grade feels "weird" on the one hand, but then on the other hand offered, "You will be happy you did it." One participant used the word

“overwhelmed” 4 different times throughout the interview. Still another participant stated that he felt “fine” about having repeated the grade, but went on to add that, “I wouldn’t want to repeat 4th grade though. Everyone would know that I’m stupid. I’m not.” Within that context of the analysis process, negative feeling words (angry, awkward, not calm (2x), shy, nervous (3x), overwhelmed (5x), worried (3x) scared (2x), mad (4x), sad (3x) embarrassing, upset (3x), pressured, uncomfortable, frustrated, bad feelings) was coded a total of 33 times. More neutral words including bored (3x), weird, not surprised, and strange were coded a total of 6 times, but positive word/phrases including fun/funny (3x), low stress, excited, happy, great, felt better, successful, and confident were coded a total of 10 times. The data presented in Figure 5.2 gives credence to the notion that students were more likely to have used neutral or negative emotive words in response to retention, given that negative/neutral feelings words were used 2.3 times more often than positive feeling words.



A review of emotive words used by students throughout the interview were contrasted with their actual responses to question six (How did you feel about having repeated the grade?). Those responses were as follows:

I think it was good. I liked it. (Researcher: "It was all good"?). Yes, the only thing I didn't like was some of the stuff I knew already and sometimes I was bored and I was like, "I already learned this."

I remember that it was good. The kids were much nicer. I would still get upset sometimes, but I know I didn't get in as much trouble.

Good. The second year I learned a lot more; (pause) how I could get over my feelings. (Researcher: "Feelings"?). Feelings of being overwhelmed. I learned to read, and I had the same teacher. That was good. I wasn't ready and I was frustrated in Kindergarten.

More successful

I feel that it was good because I learned how to speak English and to understand stuff better. I got used to speaking English faster.

I don't mind it so much now, but I didn't like it. It made me sad. (Researcher: "Sad?") Yes, because I wasn't going to be in class with my friends.

I think it helped me because I just had a lot of trouble the first time (pause) and when I did Kindergarten again, I really learned a lot.

Happy...because I liked Kindergarten and I was ascaresd of going to first grade cause you have to be really smart and I was not that smart yet.

I'm fine with it now. I think it helped me. It just felt weird at first.

Great

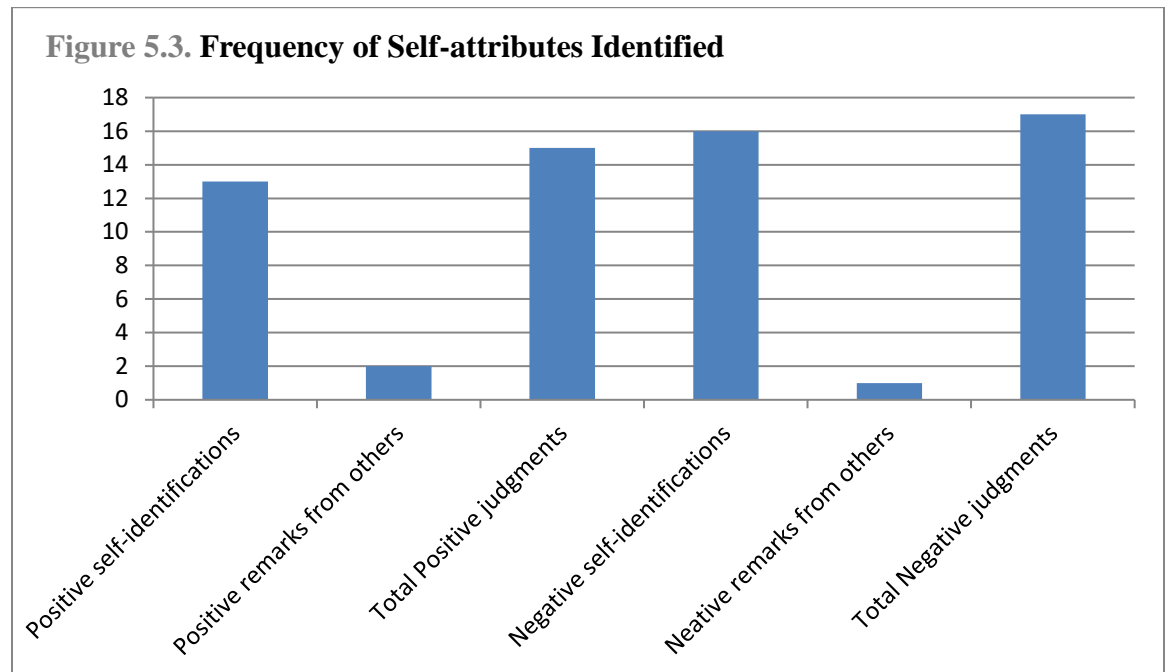
How do I feel? Uh, like fine. I wouldn't want to repeat 4th grade though. Everyone would know that I'm stupid. I'm not, but if you fail a grade two times, duh, what else are kids going to think?

When looking at student responses at face value, nine of the respondents reported that they felt “good”, “happy”, “great” or “fine”. Only one student recalled feeling “sad” and another recalled feeling “weird”. It is theorized that this phenomenon is related to limitations in a participant’s awareness of feelings and emotions faced in response to this multi-faceted experience.

Expressed judgments. The tendency for a participant to make a judgment about him or herself spontaneously occurred throughout the interview process. Most of these judgments were self-imposed and included both positive and negative judgments. Positive self-imposed judgments included, “I was good at writing in my journal”; “I can

read good”, and “I’m good at math.” Positive attributes were often skill specific and were sometimes used to contrast strengths with a weakness. For example, a 5th grade male recounted, “Spelling and English I’m good at”, as contrasted with, “I have always been bad with math.” Occasionally, participants would make a positive comment about themselves that they had heard an adult or parent say to them. A 2nd grade female remarked, “She (mom) said I was smart.”

Negative self-judgments were professed either in a matter of fact statement or as a self-imposed “inferred” negative judgment. Matter of fact statements included, “I really couldn’t learn anything,” “If I tried harder...I guess I probably could have done better,”; “I guess I wasn’t good”, and “I was not that smart yet.” Inferred negative judgments came in the form of statements such as, “Everyone would know that I’m stupid.” and “I know they were thinking that I was dumb or something.” and “I thought they might judge me like I was stupid or dumb.” The “types” of judgments that participants were volunteering about themselves within the course of the interview were examined and the dispersion of positive and negative comments were not evenly distributed. Figure 5.3 shows the prevalence of positive self-attributes (15x) identified by participants, compared with negative self attributes (17x). These numbers also include expressed positive and negative judgments that were attributed from comments that participants recalled from others or that they inferred from others. Overall, the tendency of students to make judgments suggests that the experience of retention involves a process of self-evaluation.



Blaming Factors. Participants did not always attribute retentions to something within their control and would remark on precipitating factors or school/environmental factors. Precipitating factors were disadvantages that participants identified as being inherent in their initial Kindergarten or first grade experiences. Two participants identified his and her age as a key precipitating factor. A 5th grade male shared, “My parents said I went to school too early.” Similarly, a 6th grade female identified, “I was the youngest in my class. My birthday is August 31st and you had to be five by September 1st. So, you see I had just turned five.” Later in the interview, she added, “I kinda knew the whole time that I would repeat Kindergarten.” A 3rd grade female discussed her challenges of being an English as a second language student when she entered Kindergarten. She explained, “Everyone in my family speaks Russian. I only knew how to speak Russian and when I went to school, I was supposed to know English I guess, but I hadn’t learned it yet.” A precocious 2nd grade male identified not going to pre-school as a precipitating factor. “Some kids already learned a lot of stuff and it was like they were

learning it again and...it was easy,” The same youngster also mentioned, “I lived with my Grandmother, she took care of me, but she didn’t know how to teach me. It’s not her fault.” Precipitating factors were identified more often as the reason for retention, compared with any other single identified factor.

In other instances, participants identified factors in the school environment that they seemed to attribute to their unsuccessful first year in the grade. For example, when asked why he repeated a grade, a 4th grade male seemed to cast blame on his teachers. He mentioned, “She was mean to everybody except if she liked you, but she really didn’t like hardly any kids.” A female remarked, “There were a lot of boys in my class” and later added, “The other kids were bigger and louder.” A 6th grade male seemed to blame both other students and an unresponsive teacher. He identified that, “There were mean kids in my school.” When asked by the researcher if he told anyone at school that kids were being mean to him, he responded, “Yes, but I don’t know. Sometimes teachers help, if they see it, but sometimes they would just yell and I would just get really mad sometimes.” Overall, a tendency to blame extraneous factors for retention decisions (11 occurrences) was found to occur more often than attributing retention to academic (4 occurrences) or behavioral difficulties (6 occurrences).

The “gift of time”. The idea of the “gift of time” was also a theme in participant responses. The time factor was introduced by parents or a teacher and was recalled by several of the participants. A 2nd grade female recalled her mother saying, “You might do another year of kindergarten. It could help you get ready for 1st grade.” The same little girl also mentioned the time factor as supporting academic improvement. She mentioned, “I just needed some extra time for reading.” A 5th grade male recalled his mother saying,

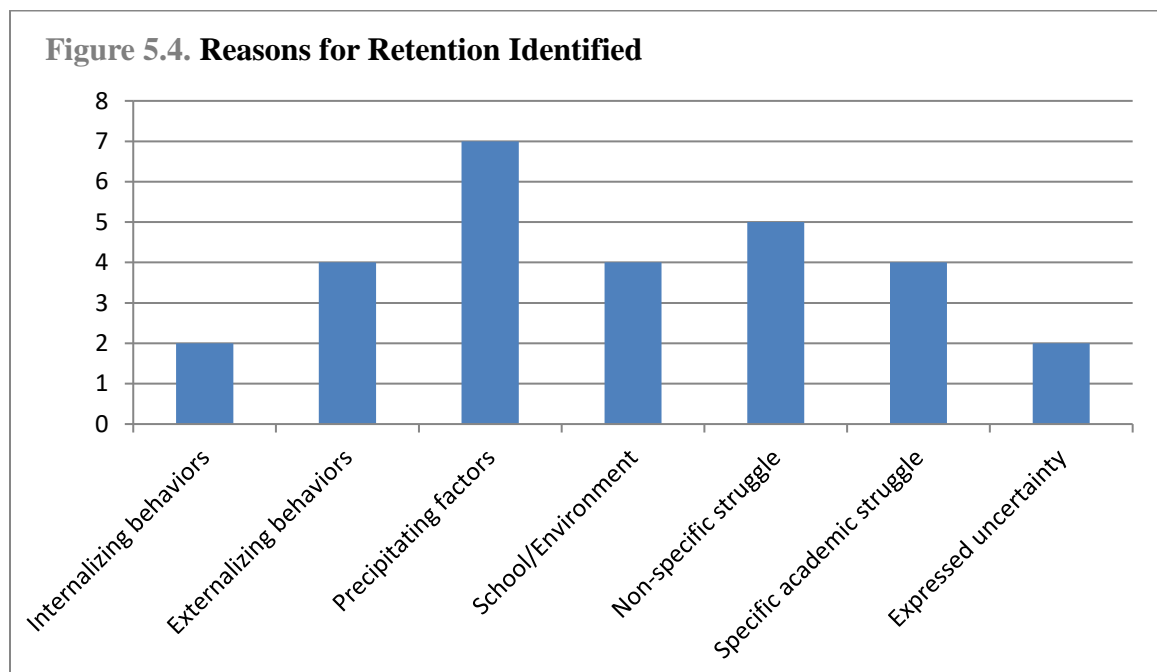
“I could learn more if I had the chance to do Kindergarten again.” A 2nd grader reflected on the conversation he had with his mother and grandmother. “They said it was a good idea because I didn’t get to learn everything yet, ya know to be a star Kindergartener.” A bilingual student recalled, “Oh, well, my mom told me that I needed more time to learn English.” A 6th grade female who repeated Kindergarten remembered being sick a lot the first year. She remembered her teacher explaining the reason why she was being retained by saying, “I didn’t have the time to learn everything I needed to know for 1st grade, like other kids.”

Regrets. Some of the participants introduced ideas of regret as if different circumstances or greater effort would have changed the fact that retention had occurred at all. When one 5th grade female, who was now bilingual and was retained in Kindergarten was asked if there were anything she would change about having repeated Kindergarten, she remarked, “Actually, maybe I could have gone to a Russian school.” Another 5th grade child, perhaps regretting that she had never spoken up, hypothesized that, “I felt like if I really wanted to go to 1st grade, maybe they (her parents) would have said yes.” A 4th grade male, who was currently receiving small group support for emotional regulation, seemed to suggest that he might have been more successful if he had received emotional support sooner. When asked if there were anything he would have changed about repeating 1st grade, he remarked, “Maybe if *Mr. Smith was allowed to help me with stuff when I was first there, I could have controlled my bad feelings and not have to do a whole extra year.” Other regrets were simply articulated such as, “I guess I probably could have done better”, and “I wish it didn’t take me so long to learn.”

Children lack a cohesive understanding of the reasons for retention. Despite most of the participants identifying the reason for retention, careful analysis of comments throughout the interview process suggested that students do not have a clear understanding of the reason for their retention. At the first level of analysis, it was paramount to review exactly what, if anything, participants identified as the reason for retention as elicited in Question #3, “Why did you repeat the grade?” At this level of analysis, all of the participants provided some sort of reasoning, including one respondent who at first said, “I’m not really sure,” but offered, “I cried sometimes” and “my teacher was mean”. Another child paused before responding saying, “Let me think about this,” and then offered a string of meandering responses (i.e. “I’m not really sure”; “I guess because I would get in fights with kids and stuff”; “Well my school had like a practice Kindergarten,”). Similarly, of the remaining nine respondents, at least three participants offered a string of reasons seeming to meander from, “I was young” to “I was shy” to “You had to do hard stuff” to “I would run around and get in trouble.” These children immediately offered a response, but as they continued to explain the reason for repeating the grade, it was evident they were less than clear in their own minds.

When evaluating the ability of a student to identify the reason for retention based on his or her response specifically to Question #3, less than 55% (6 out of 11) of the respondents were able to provide a clear reason why retention occurred. All children in the research sample attempted to report a reason, but ambiguous responding suggested the presence of uncertainty. Therefore, a fraction of the respondents displayed difficulties with demonstrating their understanding of the reason for retention at the first level of analysis. The six participants who provided more focused reasons for their retentions,

collectively, offered a variety of reasons ranging from specific academic challenges, “I had trouble knowing my numbers and letters,” to precipitating factors such, “a language barrier”. A total of 28 reasons emerged from 11 participants suggesting that on average, children tended to identify at least 2.5 reasons for the retention. Placing blame on factors outside of their control, (i.e. precipitating factors or school/environmental factors) occurred a total of 11 times, representing the most commonly sighted contributor to retention. Specific behavioral problems, including both externalized behaviors (i.e. “getting into fights with peers.”) and more internalized behaviors (i.e. “I would get upset and cry,”) were identified at the next highest level of frequency (6x each). When behavior was identified as a propagating factor, there was a higher frequency of externalized behaviors identified (4x), compared with internalized behavioral problems (2x). Non-specific struggles (i.e. “It was hard”, “behind”, “didn’t do well”) occurred slightly more often than specific academic struggles (i.e. “math was hard”). Figure 5.4 displays the categories of retention identified by the participants.



Finally, in order to take a closer look at the efficacy of the responses provided by the students explaining how they understood the reason for retention, the researcher decided to evaluate whether or not identified reasons resonated with future difficulties. Previous research (Holmes, C. T., 1989; Mantzicopoulos, P. & Morrison, D., 1992; Hong, G. & Raudenbush, S., 2005; Duncan, G.J., Dowsett, C.J., Claessens, et al., 2007; Wu, W., West, S.G. & Hughes, J.N. (2008). Chen, X., Chengfang, L., Zhang, L., Shi, Y., & Rozelle, S., 2010) has suggested that academic and social/emotional factors influencing retention decisions often continue to be present several years after a retention has occurred. A process of theoretical sampling was used to further define the properties of the theory that children often do not have a clear understanding of the reasons why they were retained. Theoretical sampling was obtained by comparing the reasons for retention as identified by the participants with reasons suggested by current supports in place, as identified by the participants. Responses to question 9, which asks students whether or not they are currently receiving any type of supportive services, was examined. Five of the participants endorsed the fact that they were receiving academic supports (writing, reading comprehension, math) and four of the participants identified more emotional/counseling support to address challenges with emotions and behaviors such as anger management and anxiety. Another child was also participating in a group, but he was unable, when asked, to identify the actual focus of the group. Only one of the interviewees reported that she did not require or participate in any type of supportive services. At this juncture of analysis, the researcher compared what participants identified as the reason or reasons for retention with areas of weakness that were now evident, based on their current level of supports. Although a correlation cannot be defined using

this method, it was of interest to the researcher to determine if there was evidence of a relationship between needs identified by child for the retention year and current needs identified by the child. Of the eleven children interviewed, only one participant identified a specific reasons for retention (academic) that continued to be an area of struggle (academic support). Four of the participants also identified a struggle for which they were still receiving support, but these same respondents identified nine other unrelated reasons as well. Two of the children were currently receiving academic supports in specific subject areas although they had not mentioned any academic struggles as the reason for the retention. Rather, precipitating factors were identified by these children. Once again, this seems to suggest that these participants were not aware of the “real reason” for their retentions. Conversely, two children who did identify academic difficulties for their retentions were currently participating in some type of group focused on emotions. Three of the youngsters that had provided meandering responses in explaining the reason for retention were found to be either not currently in need of supports or were participating in some type of support group. Finally, a child who blamed sickness and absenteeism on retention was now in an anxiety group. The relationship between participant self-identified reasons for retention and supports currently in place is shown in Table 2 and Table 3. The tables show that one child was harmonious with reasons/needs; four had some agreement between reasons and current needs, and there was no relationship between areas identified and support services in place for six of the respondents.

Table 2

Reasons for Retention Identified by Participant Compared with Support Services Currently Being Used by Participant (Participants 1-8)

Participant	Reason	Number of Occurences	Support Service	Total Ratio of Congruence
#1	Specific academic problems	2	Academic	1:1
#2	Externalized behaviors	2	Emotional	1:1
	Blaming Factor-school/environment	1	Emotional	0
	Not sure	1	Emotional	0
#3	Non-specific Struggle	1	Emotional	0
	Specific academic Problem	1	Emotional	0
#4	Blaming factor-Precipitating	1	Academic	0
	Non-specific Struggle	1	Academic	0
#5	Blaming factor-Precipitating	1	Academic	0
#6	Non-specific Struggle	2	Emotional	0
	Externalized Behaviors	1	Emotional	1:1
	Blaming factor-School environment	1	Emotional	0
#7	Blaming factor Precipitating	1	Emotional	0
#8	Blaming factor Precipitating	3	Academic	0

Table 3

Reasons for Retention Identified by Participant Compared with Support Services Currently Being Used by Participant (Participants 9-11)

Participant	Reason	Number of Occurences	Support Service	Total Ratio of Congruence
#9	Specific Problem	1	Academic	1:1
#10	Internalized Behaviors	2	No supportN/A	
	Blaming factor-Precipitating	1	No supportN/A	
	Blaming factor-School Environment	1	No supportN/A	
#11	Externalized Behaviors	1	Unspecified non-academic Support group	1:1
	Blaming factor-School environment	1	Unspecified non-academic Support group	0
	Not sure	1	Unspecified Non-academic Support group	0

Note: N/A = Not Applicable. N/A was applied when there was not a support service being provided that could be used for comparative purposes.

Significance of findings

This study provided several layers of insight into how children understand and interpret retention decisions. Although the decision to retain a child is becoming less prevalent in response to the large body of research supporting the ill-effects of retention (Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Dauber S., 2003; Bonvin, P., Bless, G., & Schuepbach, M., 2008; Hong, G. & Yu, B., 2008), retention continues to be a viable option in many educational settings and is used to address insufficient academic, social/emotional, behavioral, or functional progress. If retention continues to be an option of consideration

for young or low achieving students, then stakeholders need to consider carefully how to support and protect retained children from potential pitfalls and extraneous impacts.

First and foremost, this study provides a window into the mindset of children who have previously been retained. Rather than school entities relying exclusively on quantitative research and meta-analysis of research findings, teachers, administrators and other school officials can begin to understand what it feels like to repeat a grade and whether or not this experience is helpful and supportive to a child. This information is also of great value to parents who have spent countless hours sifting through the available research and trying to make the decision about whether or not retention is “right for **my** child”. The findings of this study shed light on best practices to effectively support a child’s ability to recover successfully from the inherent setbacks during this significant life event.

The Good News. The result of this qualitative study does find that children often respond to retention with a considerable amount of resiliency. The overall mindset of the participants was that repeating a grade was a good idea for them and that it led to positive outcomes.

Participant #1 identified that she needed more time to improve in reading and to get prepared for 1st grade. She reported that repeating Kindergarten was “good” and “I liked it.”

Participant #2 identified that repeating 1st grade kept him out of trouble. He reported that repeating 1st grade was “good”; “the kids were much nicer”, and he “didn’t get in as much trouble.”

Participant #3 identified that repeating Kindergarten was a way to help him catch up on work, and “know how to read”. He reported that repeating Kindergarten was “good” and he “learned a lot more.” Specifically, he mentioned, “I learned to read.”

Participant #4 identified that he needed to repeat 1st grade because he, “didn’t do well in class”, and he, “went to school too early.” He reported that repeating 1st grade was “really good”; he did “better in school”; got “better grades and things made more sense.” Specifically, he mentioned, “It really helped me learn how to write.”

Participant #5 identified that she needed more time to learn the English language better. She reported that repeating Kindergarten was “good” and it was “easier for her to learn.”

Participant #6 identified that 1st grade was a hard year. Although this student reported that repeating 1st grade made him “mad” and he was “embarrassed”, he was able to articulate that even though he didn’t like it at first, he “didn’t mind it so much now.”

Participant #7 identified that she needed to repeat Kindergarten because she had missed too many day of school due to illness and missed learning opportunities. She reported that repeating Kindergarten, “helped me because I just had a lot of trouble the first time.” and when I did Kindergarten again, I really learned a lot.”

Participant #8 identified that repeating Kindergarten was, “a good idea because I didn’t get to learn everything yet.” He felt “happy” about repeating Kindergarten and not having to be scared about going on to 1st grade.

Participant #9 identified that math was hard in Kindergarten and that he thought, “repeating Kindergarten was good because it helped me catch up on some of the hard stuff.” Although repeating the grade at first felt “weird” and “kinda strange”, he reported that he is now “good with multiplying numbers and good with math facts.” He encouraged others that might be repeating that they would, “become really smart in reading and will be happy you did it.”

Participant #10 recalled that when she repeated Kindergarten she was, “a lot more confident”, and that she, “felt much better after a 2nd year of kindergarten.”

Participant #11 was able to identify that when he repeated 1st grade he had a different teacher, who, “helped me if I was mad or sad. He helped me calm down.”

The Matter of Importance For Retained Children. Perhaps the most challenging thing that children identify about repeating a grade is the social ramifications and the concern expressed by students about having limited access to friendships already

formed. By the same token, meeting new friends was also identified as one of the benefits most cited by participants as something to look forward to in a repeated year. Participant #10 was the only child who did not mention any social concerns or remark on the topic of friendships.

Four of the children interviewed spoke very positively about the benefits of friendships in their retention years:

Participant #1 recalled how, in her 2nd year of Kindergarten she, “made a lot of friends,” and she still, “had other friends and I would see them sometimes.” She advised other kids who might be repeating Kindergarten to, “have fun meeting new friends.”

Participant #4 shared that, “There were five other kids who repeated” 1st grade.” When recalling his repeated year, he said, “I met new friends and still had some of my old friends.”

Participant #5 recalled what it was like to repeat Kindergarten and remarked that, “There were other kids in my class who spoke Russian too, you know, I liked talking to them and making friends with them.” She also advised kids about to face a retention that they would, “make more friends.”

Participant #7 reflected on repeating Kindergarten and shared that, “I was happy to make friends with lots of kids. I met my best friend that year.”

Three of the children in the study experienced concerns about no longer being with their peer group, although they reported that they made new friends or cited the benefit of making friends in the retention year:

Participant #2 wanted to change his retention experience by just going “to 2nd grade with everyone else.” However, he found the kids in his 2nd year as “much nicer.”

Participant #3 expressed concern that, “I had to be with a lot younger kids. I was older and they look at you differently. I thought they might judge me like I was stupid or dumb.” He also shared the uncomfortableness of trying out for basketball when he was in a lower grade than most of the other kids at tryouts. When asked what advice he would offer a student who was about to repeat the grade, he offered, “If they had friends, they will make new friends.”

Participant #9 expressed concern that she was now in the same class as her younger neighbor. She believed that because she repeated Kindergarten, “Some of the other kids would laugh at me”. She recalls struggling with some of her former friends being nice, but others didn’t seem to know her anymore. Despite her challenges with losing friends, she included, “You will make even more friends,” when asked to reflect on advice she might give to others facing a retention.

Three participants were more seriously impacted by the social stigma of repeating a grade and acknowledged the loss of friendships:

Participant #6 was concerned about the stigma of repeating and recalled that, “All my friends were looking at me.” and “I know they were thinking I was dumb or something. It was embarrassing.” She also expressed that she, “didn’t like that everyone knows.”

Participant #8, when asked to share anything he might change about repeating Kindergarten offered, “I wished that all my friends could stay with me. It was like I would see them sometimes on the playground and they would still play with me, but I was playing with my new friends too. But yea, I didn’t like that my friends weren’t in my class anymore”.

Participant #11 expressed concern that if he ever had to repeat another year of school and “Everyone would know that I’m stupid.”

Unresolved Issues. Perhaps one of the most telling phenomenon revealed in this study was the variety of emotions that participants experienced within the course of retention. The actual times of occurrence when emotional words were used in the interviews was the most notable. Emotive words were barely used when participants were asked to describe their feelings in response to being retained. Instead, emotive words appeared spontaneously in response to other questions about their retention experiences. It is theorized that the emotions experienced within the course of a retention are not fully processed by children. On the surface, children often expressed feeling “good” or “great” about repeating a Kindergarten or a 1st grade year. As the surface was scratched and the researcher dug a little deeper, participants began referring to feelings of being

overwhelmed, nervous, worried or upset. These feelings sometimes emerged when participants thought about how they initially learned they would repeat a year or in their descriptions and memories of what it was like to repeat a year. Participants also included emotional language when offering advice to students who might be facing a retention. Three participants encouraged such students not to “worry” or be “upset”. One 5th grade participant warned, “You might feel a little strange or uncomfortable” and advised, “Don’t be scared.” A 6th grade girl recognized, “You might be bored.” A 4th grade female seemed to grasp the conflicted emotional challenge of having to repeat a grade best when he advised, “Don’t fool around. You don’t want to repeat 1st grade again.” The phenomenon of the ways in which emotions were shared within the interview process suggests that emotional reactivity to grade retention is conflicted and remains unresolved for many children. It is important to mention, however, that none of the participants evidenced overt distress or upset. Rather, they interjected emotive comments in a somewhat matter of fact manner.

What Does Retention Say About Me? The result of this study shed light on the realization that a child’s self-esteem is influenced by the retention experience. Reflecting on the challenges that were present during the first year in a grade and the process of finding out retention would take place brought about verbalizations of self-identity. Participants often identified negative core beliefs such as “not smart”, “not good”. Participants were also sensitive about what others would think of them and a few mentioned the discomfort of, “everyone looking at me” or “some of the kids would laugh at me.” One participant inferred, “They were thinking I was dumb or something.”

The impact on a child's self-esteem in the retention experience is further exemplified by regrets expressed regarding things that could have been done differently. The combination of feeling "not smart" enough or "not good" enough with the sense that he or she failed to, "pick up the slack," is subject to further impact on one's self-esteem. For example, a 5th grade child expressed not having spoken up for herself, perhaps identifying herself now or in the future as having poor self-advocacy skills. A 4th grade child expressed regrets that he should, "have done better", perhaps identifying herself as having poor motivation. A 2nd grade child expressed regrets of, "taking so long to learn," perhaps identifying herself as being a slow learner.

The flip-side to this phenomenon, however, was that children were almost as likely to have experienced a positive impact on their self-esteem and sense of identity. Many participants expressed competency in specific academic areas. A 5th grade girl was proud to help younger children with acquiring math skills because she had become proficient in many areas of math. A 5th grade male reflecting on what he remembered about having repeated the grade shared, "I was good at writing in my journal." and "I got better at a lot of things." The dispersion of positive and negative self-judgments suggests that children tend to adapt judgments about themselves within the context of grade retention; however, the directionality of these judgments would appear to be malleable.

Improved Communication Regarding the Reason for Retention is Needed.

One of the most compelling phenomenon in this study is that, regardless of gender, whether retention occurred in Kindergarten or 1st grade, or the current age of the child, retained children are not able to successfully integrate all of the information about

their experiences to help them understand the reasons why they were retained. Although some of the participants identified a reason for being retained, many more of the students offered more than one reasons for retention. Three of the participants identified as many as three different reasons for retention including a 6th grade male who also stated, “I’m not really sure.”

One of the concerns that emerges is that precipitating factors and school/environmental factors were most often identified as the reason for a retention. Although casting blame away from the self could be considered a protective factor, this thinking might also contribute to the development of an external locus of control. The concept of locus of control was introduced initially in the 1950s by Julian Rotter, an American psychologist who developed many influential social learning theories. Individuals with an external locus of control have the belief that failures as well as successes are due to factors beyond one’s control. This can include “mean teachers”, unfortunate or unfair circumstances, or even just bad luck. By contrast, individuals with an internal locus of control have the belief that effort, hard work and persistence leads to success, but the lack thereof leads to failures. Students who espouse an external locus of control are often less highly motivated and less seriously engaged in learning and achievement because they do not associate effort with reward. The tendency for previously retained students to blame other factors may put them at risk for developing an ineffective locus of control.

Impact of the Findings

This study revealed several significant findings that can influence the ways in which children are supported when they have been assigned to retention. Although children in the study sample evidenced a considerable amount of resiliency in the face of a retention experience, the findings point to impacts on social relationships and exposes potential pitfalls of unresolved emotional conflict, impressionable self-esteem and self-identity, and also a tendency to adapt an external locus of control. Children do not have a sufficiently clear and accurate understanding of the reason for retention. This phenomenon is a significant contributing factor to the challenges children face in successfully overcoming this pivotal setback. Awareness of the risk factors involved in retention provides an avenue to take action in order to lessen potential negative impacts and pitfalls.

First, stakeholders involved in retention practices need to be aware that the idea of losing connections with friends is a concern for children in the retention process. At the same time, the idea of making new friends and the act of making new friends was also a positive experience for children. With this in mind, stakeholders are encouraged to provide opportunities to discuss challenges that children may face related to social connectedness when a retention is determined. The first consideration in this support level is to acknowledge that this is an area of concern and importance by engaging “to be retained” students in conversations about maintaining peer relationships and the opportunity for building additional relationships. It is important to encourage children in brainstorming about continuing social relationships through play dates, staff scheduled social meetings at school (i.e. during lunch, recess, snack time, etc.), writing letters/notes,

or making phone calls. Knowing that repeating a year does not have to mean losing social connections with friends can ease worries and can be proactive for those who do not anticipate such a loss. At the same time, helping children think and talk about the opportunity to make new friends can give “to be retained” students a benefit and something to look forward to in their experiences.

Second, the idea that previously retained students struggle with a variety of mixed emotions, regrets about the pre-retention year, and that they tend to draw conclusions about themselves in response to the retention is an area that demands a significant amount of attention and care. Certainly, a retention can be a lonely and isolated event that is not experienced by any of a child’s peers. Often, a good way to normalize events for children is through stories and literature that reflect on another child’s or an animated character’s journey down a similar road. Unfortunately, a review of children’s literature on books designed to build resiliency do not feature stories about children coping with an elementary school retention. Authors of children’s books are silent on offering advice for children facing this life experience. There are countless books about the first day of Kindergarten and riding the big yellow school bus. There are even multitudes of books about how to cope with bullies, worries, death, and divorce, but nothing about how to cope with repeating a grade and all of the different kinds of feelings one might experience. It is hoped that the information gleaned from this study will encourage children’s book authors to consider creating stories that are designed to help children process a grade retention in a constructive and resilient way. Particularly at the pre-school and Kindergarten levels, some end of year activities involve reading stories preparing

students for the next grade level. A diversified approach to preparing children for the “next year” needs to be considered.

In addition to literature and stories, another way to help children process challenging life events is to provide opportunities for them to discuss their personal experiences and to identify strategies and coping techniques to manage the “hard stuff”. Part of the challenge of effectively coping with any significant life event is ensuring that one has enough information about potential outcomes of the event to make informed decisions for management of any obstacles. Children should be given information on what to expect during the retention year and to have opportunities to ask questions. Children need to understand that it is normal to experience a wide range of emotions when they are repeating a grade and to know, also, that their school team is there to support them with working through those feelings. It will be important to check-in with them after the news is initially delivered (first response), before the end of the current school year (lingering response), at the beginning of the retention year (screening for any new questions, concerns, or evidence of worries), and as often as needed throughout the retention year. Check-ins can be provided by teachers, counselors, psychologists, administrators, or other staff in the school who have a relationship with the child. As highlighted in the response pattern of children in this study, check-ins that are simply, “How are you feeling?” will not necessarily be sufficient to evaluate any mental struggles a child might be experiencing. Rather, the researcher recommends that those assigned to “check-in” with retained children also ask children during meetings whether or not they have questions or concerns. They might be asked their thoughts on how things are going in various aspects of school such as friendships, learning, and behavior. Just as there are

a wide range of responses about how individuals respond to other significant life events, a child may feel confident and care-free on one day, but experience shame or guilt on another day. The idea of “check-ins” is not to elicit negative feelings, but to be in-tune with negative self-perceptions or negative thoughts or feelings that may arise and to provide an outlet for acknowledging and coping with or resolving these thoughts and feelings. If check-ins begin to reveal that a student continues to struggle with upsetting thoughts, then check-in/check out procedures might be beneficial.

Satisfaction with one’s work is an important indicator of one’s mental health (Kornhauser, 1965; Locke, 1976) and for elementary school students, their “work” is to be a successful student. Coping refers to the ability to master, tolerate, reduce, and minimize environmental and internal demands, as well as the conflicts among them, that result from stressful life events (Lazarus & Launier, 1978). To imagine that repeating a grade is not a stressful life event is like someone working an entire year for a promotion, only to find out that person will spend another year in the same position, because “he or she is not yet ready “ for the new position. Results of the present study shows that children are left to manage feelings of remorse, negative self-attributes, and a variety of mixed emotions. A study of this nature has not previously been conducted, so it is unknown whether or not the mixed emotions and regretful feelings continue or manifest as a child moves into adolescence and adult life. Supporting retained students as one would support any at-risk students is key to the conceptualization of how to deliver assistance. Targeted interventions may be needed to reduce or eliminate risks for previously retained children who evidence challenges with adaptability and resiliency. It

is hoped that raised awareness, monitoring, and delivering support as needed are interventions that will help to reduce possible long-term emotional dissonance.

Children who have been retained tend to form judgments about themselves, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. In order to promote the development of positive self-attributes, strategies designed for fostering positive thinking is encouraged. Teachers who have a previously retained student in their classes should be cognizant of delivering positive affirmations and positive reinforcement of demonstrated skills and behaviors. It is important to promote feelings of competency.

Children who have been retained are at risk for adopting an external locus of control. Hand in hand with positive thinking, students must adopt the mind-set that hard work results in positive outcomes and that they have the ability to be successful. At least one participant in the study presented the idea of “fear of failure” in the repeat year or subsequent years. Techniques, such as attribution training, are recommended and can easily be practiced in the general education classroom. Attribution training is a technique used to strengthen locus of control. In this technique, students are taught to employ positive self-talk when they are assigned a task or given an expectation. Self-talk should include components of, “I can do it” and “Effort will be rewarded with success.” Terminology can be modeled by teachers and staff and encouraged for use by all students in a classroom.

Overall, the results of this study find that children have the ability to be resilient in response to a retention setback, but all of the children introduced conflicted emotions. Some of the children adapted negative self-judgments or were at-risk for developing an

external locus of control. Improving communication concerning reasons why a retention is taking place, while building confidence that a child can meet expectations and that he or she is capable of a successful retention year and beyond is critical. Children need to have the opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings in response to retention and to be supported if negative thinking or confused thinking is observed during student check-ins or similar progress monitoring initiatives.

Limitations of the study

Several limitations were present in this study. First, the study did not reach full saturation because the number of participants in this study were relatively low. With small sample sizes, it is inherently difficult to know whether or not the views and opinions expressed by the participants who experience a Kindergarten or 1st grade retention is fully representative of all children who have experienced a Kindergarten or 1st grade retention.

Similarly, a second limitation of the study is the homogeneity of the sample. All of the children who participated in the study were residents of the Southeastern and Northeastern parts of Pennsylvania. Experiences of children in other states or other parts of the state may be different in how notification of retention takes place, information that is shared with children, and the commonness or uniqueness of retention practices in other schools.

Third, it is possible that the results of this study are somewhat skewed toward children whose parents engage with and use social media such as Facebook. Notifications about the study were advertised on Facebook so only parents of previously retained

elementary school students who use Facebook and who respond to public advertisements agreed to be involved in the study.

Another limitation of the study is that children were interviewed and were asked to reflect on their memories of thoughts and feelings of an event that occurred in the previous two years or beyond. They may not have recalled all of the thoughts, feelings, or events of that experience. They may also not have accurately recalled their thoughts and feelings or how events played out in their experiences.

Qualitative research always presents the risk of limited objectivity when interpreting information that is shared in an open discussion and when the research must draw on an individual's interpretations of non-verbal body language, tone, and possible inhibitory factors (parent influence, unfamiliarity with the researcher, etc.) when making determinations about patterns and meanings. The constructivist approach to qualitative analysis does recognize that subjectivity is inherent in the information gathering, coding of the data, analysis of data, and the development of theoretical constructs. Nonetheless, the element of limited objectivity is a consideration.

Finally, although queries were introduced when participants were responding to questions, there is a concern when reviewing the transcripts post-interview, that more queries and probes could have been used to explore further, some of the comments made by the children. When interviewing young children there is naturally a level of caution that is inherent in ensuring that they feel safe and comfortable with the interview process. During discussion of consent with parents and children, children were reminded that they

could stop the interview at any time should they no longer want to proceed. Nonetheless, a careful and prudent interview style was utilized.

References

- Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Dauber S. (2003). *On the success of failure: A reassessment of the effects of retention in the primary school grades*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition.
- Allen, C., Chen Q., Wilson, V., & Hughes, J.N. (2009). Quality of design moderate effects of grade retention on achievement: A meta-analytic, multi-level analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31, 480-499.
- Anderson, G. E., Jimerson, S. R., & Whipple, A. D. (2005). Student ratings of stressful experiences at home and school: Loss of a parent and grade retention as superlative stressors. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 21, 1–20.
- Barnett, S.S., Hustedt, J.T., Friendman, A.H., Boyd, J.S. & Ainsworth, P. (2007). *The state of Preschool 2007*. Rutgers: National Institute for early education research.
- Bianchi, S.M. (1984). Children's progress through school: A research note. *Sociology of Education*, 57, 184-92.
- Blair, C. (2001). The early identification of risk for grade retention among African American children at risk for school difficulty. *Applied Developmental Science*, 5(1), 37–50.
- Bogard, K. & Takanish, R. (2005). An aligned and coordinated approach to education for children 3 to 8 years old. *Social Policy Report*, 19(3), 3-22.

Bonvin, P., Bless, G., & Schuepbach, M. (2008). Grade retention: decision-making and effects on learning as well as social and emotional development. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19(1), 1-19.

Bowman-Perrott, L. J., Herrera, S., & Marry, K. (2010). Reading difficulties and grade retention: What's the connection for English language learners? *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 26(1), 91–107.

Bracey, G.W, (2002). Raising achievement of at-risk students—or not [Summary of research by B.A. Jacob, M. Roderick, & M. Engel]. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(6), 431-432.

Brophy, J. (2006). Grade repetition. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001520/152038e.pdf> (This publication has been produced the International Academy of Education (IAE) and the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).

Brown, E.L, (1981). Retention: The team approach. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, 54 (8), 348-349.

Burkam, D. T, LoGerfo, L., Ready, D., & Lee, V. E. (2007). The differential effects of repeating kindergarten. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 12(2), 103–136.

- Byrd, R.S., Weizman, M. & Auinger, P. (1997). Increased behavior problems associated with delayed school entry and delayed school progress, *Pediatrics*, 100(4), 654-61.
- Byrnes, D. A. (1989). Attitudes of students, parents, and educators toward repeating a grade. In L. A. Shepard & M. L. Smith (Eds.), *Flunking grades: Research and policies on Retention*, (108–131). New York: New York.
- Center for Demography and Ecology. (1999). *Should We End Social Promotion? Truth and Consequence*. (CDE Working Paper No. 99-06). Madison, WI: Hauser, R.M.
- Chen, X., Chengfang, L., Zhang, L., Shi, Y., & Rozelle, S. (2010). Does taking one step back get you two steps forward? Grade retention and school performance in poor areas in rural China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30, 544-559.
- Corman, H. (2003). The effects of state policies, individual characteristics, family characteristics, and neighborhood characteristics on grade repetition. *Economics of Education Review*, 22, 409-420.
- DelConte, J. (2012) Grade retention: *An exploration of the pedagogical experiences and attitudes of elementary principals that influence decisions to retain students in a grade* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from [Scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/11\(11-A\)](http://Scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/11(11-A)).

Duncan, G.J., Dowsett, C.J., Claessens, A., Magnuson, K., Huston, A.C.; Klebanov, P.

Pagani, L.S., Feinstein, L., Engel, M., Brooks-Gunn, J. , Duckworth, K. &

Japel, B. (2007). School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental*

Psychology, Nov 3(6), 1428-1446.

Duncan, G.J. and Magnuson, K.A. (2005). Can family socioeconomic resources account

for racial and ethnic test score gaps? *Future Child*. Spring 15(1), 35-54

Eide,E.R. & Showalter, M.H. (2001). The effect of grade retention on education and

labor market outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 20(6), 563-76.

Elam, S.M. (1990). The 22nd annual gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the

Public Schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 72(1), 41-54.

Frey, N. (2005). Retention, social promotion, and academic redshirting: What do we

know and need to know? *Remedial and Special Education*, 26(6), 332-346.

Gloeckler, T. (1986). Data-based decision-making procedures for determining in-grade

retention. *Education*, 107, 182–186.

- Graue, M. E., & DiPerna, J. (2000). Redshirting and early retention: Who gets the “gift of time” and what are its outcomes? *American Educational Research Journal*, 37, 509–534.
- Greene, J. P., & Winters, M. A. (2009). The effects of exemptions to Florida's test-based promotion policy: Who is retained? Who benefits academically? *Economics of Education Review*, 28, 135-142.
- Holmes, C. T. (1989). Grade level retention effects: A meta-analysis of research studies. In L. A. Shepard & M. L. Smith (Eds.), *Flunking grades: Research policies on retention* (pp. 16–33). New York: New York.
- Holmes, C. T., & Matthews, K. M. (1984). The effects of nonpromotion on elementary and junior high school pupils: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 54(2), 225–236.
- Hong, G. & Raudenbush, S.(2005). Effects of kindergarten retention policy on children’s cognitive growth in reading and mathematics. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 27(3), 205-224.
- Hong, G., & Yu, B. (2007). Early-grade retention and children's reading and math learning in elementary years. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 29(4), 239-261.

- Hong, G., Yu, B. (2008) Effects of Kindergarten Retention on Children's Social-Emotional Development: An Application of Propensity Score Method to Multivariate, Multilevel Data. *Developmental Psychology*, 44 (2), 407–421.
- House, E.R. (1989). Policy implications of retention. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), *Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention* (pp. 202-213). New York: New York.
- Jackson, G.D. (1975) The research evidence on the effects of grade retention. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 613–635.
- Janus, M. & Duku, E. (2007). The school entry gap : Socioeconomic, family, and health factors associated with children's school readiness to learn. *Early Education and Development*, 18(3), 375-403.
- Jimerson, S. R. (2001). Meta-analysis of grade retention research: Implications for practice in the 21st century. *School Psychology Review*, 30(3), 420–437.
- Jimerson, S. R., & Ferguson, P. (2007). A longitudinal study of grade retention: Academic and behavioral outcomes of retained students through adolescence. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22(3), 314-339.

Jimerson, S. R., Ferguson, P., Whipple, A., Anderson, G., & Dalton, M. (2002).

Exploring the association between grade retention and dropout: A longitudinal study examining socio-emotional, behavioral, and achievement characteristics of retained students. *The California School Psychologist*, 7, 51-62.

Jimerson, S. & Kaufman, A. (2003). Reading, writing, and retention: A primer on grade retention research. *The Reading Teacher*, 56(7), 622-35.

Jimerson, S., Woehr, S., & Kaufman, A. (2004). Grade retention and promotion:

Important information for parents. In A.S. Canter, S.A. Carroll, L. Paige, & I. Romero (Eds.), *Helping children at home and school: Handouts from your school psychologist* (2nd ed.). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Kirst, M.W. (2000). Bridging education research and education policymaking. *Oxford Review of Education*, 26(3/4), 379-91.

Labaree, D. (1984). Setting the standard: Alternative policies for student promotion. *Harvard Educational Review*, 54(1), 67-87.

La Paro, K.M. & Pianta, R.C. (2000). Predicting children's competence in the early school years: A meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 70 (4).

Lincove, J. & Painter, G. (2006) "Does the age that children Start kindergarten matter?"

Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 28(2), 153-179.

Mantzicopoulos, P. (1997). Do certain groups of children profit from early retention? A

follow-up study of kindergarteners with attention problems. *Psychology in the Schools*, 34(2), 115-127

Mantzicopoulos, P. & Morrison, D. (1992). Kindergarten retention: Academic and

behavioral outcomes through the end of second grade. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29, 182-198.

Mantzicopoulos, P., Morrison, D.C., Hinshaw, S.P. and Carte, E.T. (1989).

Nonpromotion in kindergarten. The role of cognitive, perceptual, visual-motor, behavioral, achievement, socioeconomic, and demographic characteristics:

American Educational Research Journal 26, 107-121.

Martin, A. J. (2009). Age appropriateness and motivation, engagement, and performance,

in high school: Effects of age within cohort, grade retention, and delayed school entry. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101(1), 101-114.

Merrick, J., McCreery, K., & Brown, J. (1998). *Student success in a standards-based*

system: Moving beyond social promotion and retention. Sacramento, CA:

Association of California School Administrators.

- Mitchell, D.E., Encarnation, D.J. (1984). Alternative state policy mechanisms for influencing school performance. *Educational Researcher*, 13 (5), 4-11.
- Morrison, F. J., Griffith, E. M., & Alberts, D. M. (1997). Nature–nurture in the classroom: Entrance age, school readiness, and learning in children. *Developmental Psychology*, 33(2), 254–262.
- Murphy, J. (1990). The educational reform movement of the 1980's: A comprehensive analysis. In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The educational reform movement of the 1980's: Perspective and cases* (pp.3-55). Berkley, CA: McCutchan.
- Nason, R.B. (1991). Retaining children. Is it the right decision? *Childhood Education*, 67, 300-304.
- National Association of School Psychologists. (1998). *Position statement: Student grade retention and social promotion*. Silver Spring, MD.
- National Education Goals Panel. (1998). *Ready schools: A report of the Goal 1 Ready Schools Resource Group*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

National Center for Education Statistics (2009). *The Condition of Education 2009*.

(NCES 2009-081). Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S.

Department of Education:

Planty, M., Hussar, W., Snyder, T., Kena, G., Ramani, A. K., Kemp, J., Bianco, K., and

Dinkes, R. National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative of educational reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. (1999) *When students don't succeed: Shedding light on grade retention*. Portland, OR: Fager, J. & Richen, R.

Ou, S. R., & Reynolds, A. J. (2008). Predictors of educational attainment in the Chicago longitudinal study. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(2), 199-229.

Ou, S. R., & Reynolds, A. J. (2010). Grade retention, postsecondary education, and public aid receipt. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 32(1), 118–139.

Pierson, L. H., & Connell, J. P. (1992). Effects of grade retention on self-system processes, school engagement, and academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 84, 300–307.

Range, B; Pijanowski, J, Holt, C., & Young, S (2010). The perceptions of primary grade teachers and elementary principals about the effectiveness of grade-level Retention. *Professional Educator*, 36(1), 24-37.

Ray, K.,& Smith, M. (2010). The Kindergarten Child: What teachers and administrators need to know to promote academic success in all children. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 38, 5–18.

Reynolds, A.J. (2002). Age 21 cost-benefit analysis of the title 1 chicago child-parent centers. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(4), 267-303.

Roberts, D.C.. (2008). Perceptions of educators on grade retention: A qualitative study. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 68(11-A), 45-69.

Roberts, C. & Camphaus (2003) *Handbook of Psychological and Educational Assessment of Children*. New York: New York. Guildford Press.

Sandoval, J. (1984) Repeating first grade: How the decision is made. *Psychology in the Schools*, 21 (4), 457-462.

Sarson, S. (1996) *Revisiting “the culture of school and the problem of change”*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Shadish, W. R., Cook, T. D., & Campbell, D. T. (2002). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Shepard, L.A. (1989). A review of research on kindergarten retention. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.) *Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention* (pp. 64-78). London: The Falmer Press.
- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1985) Boulder Valley kindergarten study: Retention practices and retention effects. Colorado: Research/Technical Reports (143).
- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1989). Academic and emotional effects of kindergarten retention in one school district. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.) *Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention* (pp. 79-107). London: The Falmer Press.
- Silberglitt, B., Jimerson, S. R., Burns, M. K., & Appleton, J. J. (2006). Does the timing of grade retention make a difference? Examining the effects of early versus later retention. *School Psychology Review*, 35(1), 134–141.
- Slavin, R.E., Karweit, N.L., & Madden, N.A. (1989). *Effective programs for students at risk*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Slavin, R.E., Karweit, N.L., & Wasik, B.A. (1994). *Preventing early school failure: Research, policy, and practice*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Slavin, R.E., & Madden, N.A. (2001). *One million children: Success for all*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Slavin, R.E., Madden, N.A., Karweit, N.L., Livermon, B.J., & Dolan, L. (1989). Can every child learn? An evaluation of “success for all” in an urban elementary school. *Journal of Negro Education*, 58, 357–366.

Southern Regional Education Board (2001). *Finding alternatives to failure: Can states end social promotion and reduce retention rates?* Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

Tanner, K.C. & Galis, S.A. (1997). Student retention: Why is there a gap between the majority of research findings and school practice? *Psychology in the Schools*, 34(2), 107-14.

Tomchin, E. M., & Impara, J. C. (1992). Unraveling teachers’ beliefs about grade retention. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29(1), 199–223.

Tramontana, M.G., Hooper, S. & Selzer, S.C. (1988). Research on preschool prediction of later academic achievement: *Developmental Review* 8, 89-146.

- U.S. Department of Education. (1999). *Taking responsibility for ending social promotion: A guide for educators and state and local leaders*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Wagner, M. M. (1995) Outcomes for youth with serious emotional disturbance in Secondary school and early adulthood. *The Future of Children*, (5) 90-112.
- West, S. G., & Themes, F. (2008). Equating groups. In P. Alasuutari, L. Bickman, & J. Brannen (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social research methods* (pp. 414–430). London: Sage.
- Winsler, A, Hutchison, L., & De Feyter, J. (2012). Child, family, and childcare predictors of delayed school entry and kindergarten retention among linguistically and ethnically diverse children. *Developmental Psychology*, 48(5), 1299-1314.
- Witmer, S.M., Hoffman, L.M. & Notis, K.E. (2004). Elementary teacher beliefs and knowledge about grade retention: How do we know what they know? *Education* 125(2) 173-194.
- Wu, W., West, S.G. & Hughes, J.N. (2008). Effects of retention in first grade on children's achievement trajectories over four years. A piecewise growth analysis using propensity score matching. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100, 727-

740.

Wu, W., West, S., Hughes, J. (2010). Effects of grade retention in first grade on psychosocial outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102 (1), 135–152.

Xia, C. & Glennie, E. (2005). Grade retention: A flawed education strategy. *Policy Brief, Center for Child and Family Policy: Duke University*, 1-28.

Yamamoto, K., & Byrnes, D.A. (1987). Primary childrens' ratings of the stressfulness of experiences. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 2(2), 117–121.

Appendix A

Research Assent Form



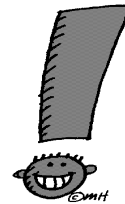
What is a research study?

Research studies help us learn new things. We can test new ideas. First, we ask a question. Then we try to find the answer.

This paper talks about our research and the choice that you have to take part in it. We want you to ask us any questions that you have. You can ask questions any time.

Important things to know...

- You get to decide if you want to take part.
- You can say 'No' or you can say 'Yes'.
- No one will be upset if you say 'No'.
- If you say 'Yes', you can always say 'No' later.
- You can say 'No' at any time.
- We would still take good care of you no matter what you decide.



Why are we doing this research?

We are doing this research to find out more about the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of students who have repeated Kindergarten.



What would happen if I join this research?

If you decide to be in the research, we would ask you to do the following:

- Talking: A person on the research team would ask you 8 questions. Then you would say your answers out loud.



Could bad things happen if I join this research?

Some of the questions might make you uncomfortable or might be hard to answer. However, there are no right or wrong answers because it is just your opinion. We will try to make sure that no bad things happen.

You can say ‘no’ to what we ask you to do for the research at any time and we will stop.



Could the research help me?

This research will not help you. We do hope to learn something from this research though. Someday we hope it will help other kids who might repeat kindergarten, just like you did.



What else should I know about this research?

If you don’t want to be in the study, you don’t have to be.

It is also OK to say yes and change your mind later. You can stop being in the research at any time. If you want to stop, please tell the research people.

To thank you for being in the study, we would give you a 5\$ gift certificate to Sundae World. You should talk with your parents about how you would like to use this.

You can ask questions any time. You can talk to Tina Mollett. Ask us any questions you have. Take the time you need to make your choice.



Is there anything else?

If you want to be in the research after we talk, please write your name below. We will write our name too. This shows we talked about the research and that you want to take part.

Name of Participant _____

(To be written by child/adolescent)

Printed Name of Researcher _____

Signature of Researcher _____

Appendix B- Parent Consent Form

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

On File at PCOM- Depart of School Psychology

Appendix C- Call for Research Participants

PCOM Research: Call for Research Participants posted 10/8/2017-11/9/2017

Seeking elementary school students who have repeated Kindergarten or 1st grade. All interested participants should contact Retentioninterview@gmail.com. A \$15 Visa gift card will be provided to the first 20 eligible participants (elementary school student who has repeated K or 1st). Child and Parent consent will be required. Interviews can be scheduled via phone or local library.

Appendix D

List of Research Questions

- 1) Did you repeat kindergarten?
- 2) Why did you repeat Kindergarten?
- 3) How did you find out that you would repeat Kindergarten? Who told you? What did they say?
- 4) Did you agree that it was a good idea to repeat kindergarten? Why or why not?
- 5) Now that you are in ____ grade, what was good about repeating kindergarten?
What was not good about repeating Kindergarten?
- 6) If you had the chance to go back to the time when it was being decided that you should repeat kindergarten, would you still want to repeat kindergarten? Why or why not?
- 7) If you could change one thing about the experience of repeating kindergarten, what would it be?
- 8) Do you get any kind of special help at school?